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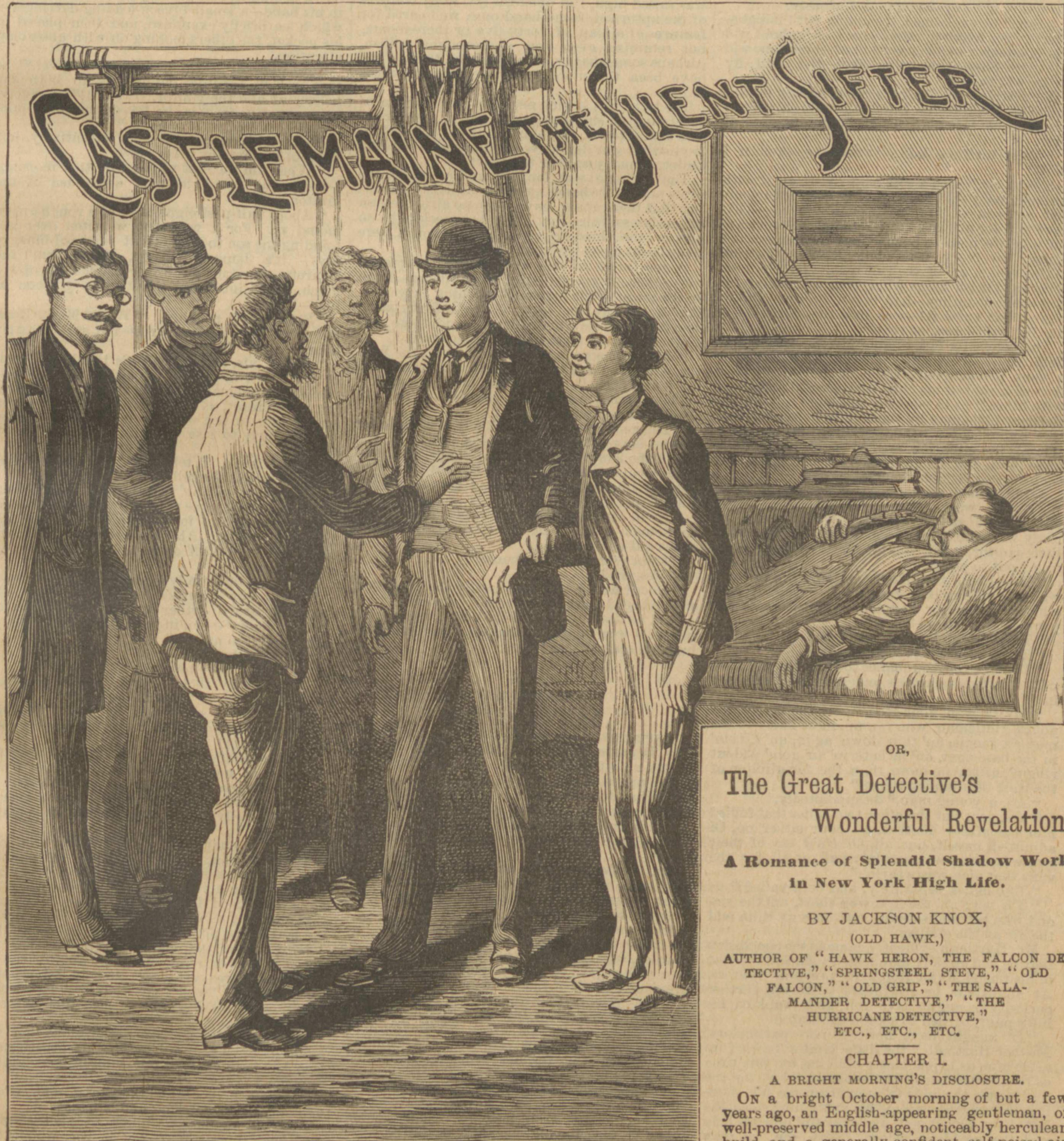
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OR,  
The Great Detective's  
Wonderful Revelation.

A Romance of Splendid Shadow Work  
in New York High Life.

BY JACKSON KNOX,  
(OLD HAWK,)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DETECTIVE," "SPRINGSTEEL STEVE," "OLD FALCON," "OLD GRIP," "THE SALAMANDER DETECTIVE," "THE HURRICANE DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

## CHAPTER I

### A BRIGHT MORNING'S DISCLOSURE.

On a bright October morning of but a few years ago, an English-appearing gentleman, of well-preserved middle age, noticeably herculean build, and a generally confident, self-poised air—the Hon. H. Digby Severne-Hartlieth by name, and well-known in New York fashionable

"OCH, SOR, DO NOT TAKE ME JEMMY AWAY FROM ME!" EXCLAIMED THE OLD JANITOR.  
"HE IS NOT THE MURDERER, SURELY!"

# Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.

society—rung the entrance-bell of a costly bachelors' apartment-house in lower Fifth avenue.

"Ah, Patsey, good-moruing to you, my man," he said, in a good-natured, aristocratic drawl, to the janitor, a stockily-built, bristling, little old Irishman, who opened the door for him. "My friend, Major Rorston, is at home, I suppose?"

He had passed in, and was moving with a familiar step toward an elevator entrance, that was alongside of a richly-carpeted stairway to the right of the vestibule, when the janitor, who had closed the main door, called after him dryly, and with a spice of Celtic acrimony, which probably everything and anything English was apt to arouse in his impulsive nature:

"But it isn't be the illivathor that yez wull raich Major Rorston's room this day, sor, barrin' ye have wings. It's bruk, an' laid up for repairs."

"Ah, indeed!" and, with a slight gesture of impatience, the visitor turned toward the stair, which meant a climb to the extent of three flights up. "By the way, Patsey," with a studiously indifferent air, "has the major had other visitors before me this morning that you have noticed?"

But the janitor was something of a privileged character, whose intense nationalism was wont to furnish no end of amusement for the aristocratic tenants—most of them gay young men about town—of the Piccadilly Bachelors' Apartment House, as it was called. And now, instead of answering the simple interrogation directly, he suddenly wheeled upon the herculean Mr. Hartlieth, bristling like a little porcupine, and with his beady little eyes snapping furiously.

"Sor!" he exclaimed, trembling with indignation; "yez mayhap coom over to Aingland wid the Conqueror—bad 'cess to him!—or mebbe wid the first Sassenachs themselves—the devil fly away wid them!"

Forgetful of the janitor's idiosyncracy for the moment, Mr. Severne-Hartlieth could only screw his monocle into his eye and languidly stare at first.

"Bless me!" he said; "what the devil if I did?"

"Wal, sir," with a sort of flourish, as if with an imaginary shillaly, "wid due respict to yourself as wan of Major Rorston's fri'nds—God save him for a turue shtar-shpangled American, an' a lady's man to boot!—that me name is not Patsey to ivery wan, but *Mister* Patrick O'Goolerhan, an' of the rale owld O'Goolerhans who war Oirish kings whin your own desateful Sassenach counthry—bad 'cess to the owld Dutch quane that rules it!—was devil the more than a howlin' wilderness, at that!"

The colossally fashionable Mr. Severne-Hartlieth, who had evidently entered the building in a very preoccupied frame of mind, at first frowned, rubbed his chin, and seemed debating with himself as to whether he should snatch up the fiery little man by the scruff of the neck and toss him out of a window. Then the amusing side of the situation seemed suddenly to flash upon him, and he gave utterance to a hearty, deep-chested British chuckle.

"Gad, I had altogether forgotten!" he said. "By the way, *Mister* O'Goolerhan," with the utmost suave gravity, whose tinge of irony was wholly lost upon the already placated little janitor, "will you kindly answer the question I put to you?"

"That I will, your Honor, an' long life to yez!" was the enthusiastic response. "Och, it war whither the major had had any visitors before yourself this blissed day?"

"That was it, Mr. O'Goolerhan."

"There war thray, your Honor."

"Three? Did you chance to know them?" now with a certain eagerness underneath his assumed indifference.

"Devil a wan, your Honor; for the first was a young gentleman, who ran up, most likely to the major's rooms, an' thin down ag'in, an' I, bein' in the basement, an' he enterin' an' goin' widout ringin', gittin' no more than the far-glimpse of the back of him aich toime."

"Ah, a young man," disappointedly.

"Yis, sor; but the other two ladies that follied him, one after another, an hour lather on, Oi admitted meself, but all Oi c'u'd say of their swate faytures was nothin' at all, at all, for the vails that aich was wearin'."

"Two ladies, separately, and both vailed?"

"Yis, sor; an' the first wan short, an' the second wan tall and shtately, an' both av them wid the air av the quality."

Mr. Hartlieth evidently came to the conclusion that he had already manifested sufficient interest in his friend Major Rorston's previous visitors. At all events, he restrained whatever further curiosity he might have felt, and, thanking his informant, turned to ascend the stairs.

"Oi moight have noticed more particulars, *Mister* Hartlieth," the little janitor bawled up after him, as loquaciously obliging by this time as he had been surly at the outset, "but for the devil's own throule Oi'm in about me b'y, Jemmy, as hasn't shown me his purty mug since the last lady called, an' me expicitin' him to help wid the coal-bins below. Sure, sor, ye may have noticed an' taken an interest in the b'y—as talinted a young mon o' eighteen as ever ate a

pertater, barrin' the cigarette-smokin' as is dhrivin' him wake an' silly betoimes—Och! to the devil wid it, thin!" For the visitor was by this time far up out of hearing, and Mr. O'Goolerhan, not a little red in the face from having exercised his lungs so unavailingly, resumed some work with a feather-duster which had been interrupted by Mr. Hartlieth's entrance.

A minute or two later he heard the visitor's voice—but so terribly changed as to positively appall him, even apart from the awful import of its utterance—fairly shouting down the stairs to him.

"Patsey! Patsey!" he vociferated; "come up here, and bring a policeman with you. Great God! there's murder done."

Murder? No thought of the outraged Hibernian dignity now. The little janitor was out of the house in a twinkling, and, fortunately, a policeman chanced to be just within hail. In another instant the pair were hurrying into the fourth floor outer passage, where Mr. Hartlieth, greatly agitated, was awaiting them.

He pointed to a half-open door.

"It was slightly ajar when I knocked," he managed to explain, "and as there was no answer, I entered. But look for yourselves. My poor frierd, it is appalling!"

Then he followed them—half-shrinking, in spite of his vast strength and doubtless accustomed strong nerve—into the room, a richly furnished one, and communicating with others.

Major Rorston, the occupant, lay half-reclining upon a luxurious lounge, quite dead. The bright morning sun poured its vivid beams from a near-at-hand casement, the curtain of which was raised high, full upon the set, stony features of the upturned face—handsome, well-cared for features of a man of forty-five or thereabouts, but retaining even now a thoroughly selfish, perhaps somewhat cruel, expression, that should have been the more pronounced characteristic in life.

The body was in rich negligee morning dress, consisting of dressing-gown, shirt, loose trousers and slippers, the shirt showing a red stain from what was doubtless an internally-bleeding bullet wound just over the heart.

The attitude was languid and peaceful, the arms and white hands hanging carelessly—showing that there could have been no struggle—an expensive solitaire ring gli tening mockingly on one of the third fingers, while diamonds were likewise in the shirt-front.

A gentleman of ease and pleasure, overtaken altogether unexpectedly by a murderous death in the midst of his luxurious morning privacy—that was about the fact of it at a first glance. The furniture was undisturbed, and there was neither weapon, footmark, or other trace.

"Arrah, the poor gienteelman!" cried the janitor, wildly. "It's the docthor that's wantin' in the foorst place." And he was off like a shot.

The officer, for a wonder, chanced to be both intelligent and sensible.

"The gentleman has most likely been dead for several hours," he said, touching the brow and one of the hands. "I should remain here, and yet my captain and Inspector Byrnes should be notified immediately," with a glance at Mr. Hartlieth.

"I will attend to that," promptly replied that gentleman, who had by this time regained much of his self-control.

"Prince street station-house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! and I will also notify the inspector, with whom I have a passing acquaintance."

And he likewise quitted the place, with a spryness that was highly creditable, considering his huge muscularity of frame.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE DETECTIVE.

INSPECTOR BYRNES, the Chief of the Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police, looked up after listening to Mr. Severne-Hartlieth's message, and touched a bell.

"What detectives are in the waiting-room?" he demanded of the man who answered it.

"Only one, inspector—Mr. Castlemaine."

"Just the man for the business! send him here."

Mr. Castlemaine was quickly forthcoming—a very tall and very slender young man, with clear, observant gray eyes and an agreeable expression of countenance.

In response to the inspector's request, Mr. Hartlieth repeated in detail his discovery of the murder, together with what the janitor had told him with regard to the unfortunate gentleman's previous visitors of that morning.

"You were rather inquisitive, it seems, Mr. Hartlieth," suggested Inspector Byrnes, with a slight smile under his great mustache, with which so many New Yorkers are familiar, "regarding your friend's previous visitors, before going up to him?"

"I had reason to be, inspector," was the calm reply. "Major Rorston and I were business associates, no less than intimate friends—something in the diamond-brokering line—and I was interested in knowing if a certain party had visited him to day before seeing me."

"One of those whom the janitor described as having called, do you think?"

"No, sir," promptly. "And I cannot imagine who either one of those could have been."

Mr. Hartlieth spoke very frankly, to all appearances, and with the utmost sincerity.

"All right, and thank you," said the inspector, with a general motion of dismissal. "Castlemaine, the case is yours. Find out which of the veiled ladies did this deed, and, if you are lucky, you should have her identified when you report to me this evening. That will do."

When the detective, accompanied by Mr. Hartlieth, reached the scene of the murder, the physician whom the janitor had brought with him after considerable delay, was just completing his examination of the body.

"Here is work for the coroner," said the medical man, briefly. "Death was instantaneous, the bullet having directly pierced the heart," he pointed to the wound, a small bullet-hole, from which he had cut away the clothing, "and probably occurred within the past two hours, for the body is cold, but not yet wholly rigid." He looked at his watch. "It is now nearly twelve."

"It was just eleven when I first called," suggested Mr. Hartlieth. "And I first made the discovery here, say, five minutes later."

Castlemaine had taken in apparently every item of the surroundings with a swift, comprehensive glance.

"No weapon?" he said, half to himself. "And yet it might have been left behind, as a clew."

He drew out the lounge—upon which the body had remained practically undisturbed—reached down behind it, and gravely arose with a pistol in his hand—a small breech-loading derringer—which he briefly examined, and then placed in his pocket, the others looking on with absorbing attention.

"No general alarm has yet been given?" he then asked, turning inquiringly to both the policeman and the janitor. "Good!" on receiving a negative from each; "keep the affair quiet for an hour longer, if possible."

He then examined the floor attentively, but without finding any other clew.

"When did the first visitor call this morning—the young man?" he next demanded of the janitor.

"About half-past eight, sor; at a rough guess, moind ye. For I was that worried over not foinding me son to help me at the coal-bins, ye say—It's Jemmy I m'ane, sor, barrin' the cigarette-shmokin' an' an occasional dhrop too much, as talinted an' beautiful a gossoon as iver—"

"Stow that!" roughly. "Would Major Rorston have been up and dressed at such an early hour?"

"Bedad, yis, sor, an' wid his breakfast inside of him! It's meself as fetched it to him—och, the poor gienteelman! at siven from the neighboring restabrant, as I always did. For if it was mostly late to bed wid the major, it was none the less airy to rise wid him; and mony's the day—"

"Drop it all, I tell you! The first veiled lady, when did she call?"

"The short one, an' wid the aisly, floatin' kerriagie av herself loike a lady o' the land, for all that she made up in dumpiness what she was lackin' in hioht. About nine o'clock, or a little later, an' she was off ag'in in a matther o' ten minutes, sor."

"And the other lady—much taller, you say?"

"Loike our Impress av the Realm! She came, say at half-after nine, an' remained even shorter, comin' down in something av a hurry, now I call it to moind."

"Apparently excit'd, eh?"

"It noight have been, sor."

"Judging by their figures, might you ever have seen either of the ladies before?"

"Devil a bit," scratching his head, "though Oi've a shrewd eye in me head for the faymale figure, at that!"

"You exchanged words with them, though?"

"Only in monysyllables, sir, an' the voices war the reverse of familiar to me intellects."

"You heard nothing that might have been a shot—especially during the visit of the last and taller lady?"

"Devil a snap, sor, or Oi'd have been oop here like a Paggysus wid fedders an' plumes! For, look yez, sor, it's the broth av a b'y Oi am meself when aiven suspectin' gunpowdher or dynamite—good luck to the swate explosion that shall yet humble the Tower of London until the bottomless pit! an' barrin' the absence of me Jemmy, what the cigarette-shmokin' has reduced to that extremity in body an' intellect—"

"These three visitors!" sternly interrupted the detective; "why may they not have come to visit some other tenant besides this unfortunate gentleman?"

"Bekase it was the poor major alone that the ladies inquired for; an', besides, no other tenant ever had lady visitors but himself, poor ginteelman."

"But the first visitor, the young man, whom you only heard entering and leaving?"

"Besides catching a glimpse av his coat-tails, sor—don't forget that—an' it was a new fall overcoat, brown in color, that it was. Well,

sor, no other tenant than the major ever re-sayved any visithor so airly in the mornin'."

Apparently somewhat disappointed, Castlemaine again threw his observant gaze about the luxurious room, when something like a movement, apparently within a richly carved, highly polished black walnut wardrobe, attracted his attention.

As he stepped up to it, he perceived that the doors were locked, but with the key remaining in place.

Quickly turning back the key, and opening the doors—probably expecting to find an imprisoned cat—he started back in no little surprise.

A thin youth of eighteen or twenty, with a series of vapid, vacant smiles playing over his lips, like rippling water over gaping stones, unconcernedly stepped into view, and began to babble incoherently.

"Me Jemmy!" exclaimed Mr. O'Goolerhan, ecstatically; "me b'y! Och, and phwat is this? wid the cigarette-p'izen turned into pure idiocy at last?" And he, nevertheless, clasped the youth in his fervent Irish embrace.

But "Jemmy" apathetically disengaged himself from the paternal caress, and, pointing vacantly at the dead man, began to babble afresh, and all in a breath, something in this fashion:

"Yes, yes, I want my cigarettes! Oh, the lovely diamonds, how they blink, how they sparkle! Yes, I swear I won't tell of it, so you needn't threaten me with the dagger. Ah, that is the pistol, eh? and your firing it through your pocket prevented the noise of it from ringing out! Wait, wait!" passing a trembling hand helplessly over his brow. "Is it myself that's shot, or the poor major over there? The cigarettes, the cigarettes! you promised me money for them. Aha, aha!" And, closing with a self-satisfied idiotic chuckle, he produced and jingled admiringly in his hand some pieces of silver, after which nothing less incoherent could be extracted from him, though the detective did his best to that end.

"It's all in a nutshell," observed Castlemaine, at last. "This weak-minded boy has doubtless in some way witnessed the murder, and then terrorized into confused idiocy by the murderer. If memory should return to him, we will have the criminal dead to rights."

Mr. Hartlieth, the physician and the policeman gravely nodded their acquiescence in this theory, which was, indeed, sufficiently obvious, though new trouble was gathering on poor Mr. O'Goolerhan's brow.

The latter's consternation increased pitifully when the detective set his official grip, not unkindly, on the youth's arm, with the evident intention of taking him into custody.

"Och, sor, do not take me Jemmy away from me!" exclaimed the old janitor, clasping his hands. "He is not the murderer surely! He is me only b'y. L'ave him wid me, sor, Oi besayche yez!"

"To poison himself yet more irrevocably with the accursed cigarettes, and perhaps whisky, to boot?" replied Castlemaine. "Not much!"

"No, no; on me honor, sor, Oi'll kape him away from the murtherin' shtuff till his poor, wanderin' sinses come back to him."

But the detective was inexorable.

"That can be done much better by intelligent hospital treatment," said he, "and he will, moreover, have the finest of care."

He accordingly led the still vacantly smiling youth away with him forthwith, leaving the fatal apartment in charge of the officer and yet another one, who had by this time been called in.

Yet, before he could quit the building with his charge the janitor's boisterous lamentations had aroused all the other tenants, and curious sight-seers even began to flock in from the street before they could be prevented.

But it would have had to come sooner or later. The "murder was out at last," and with a publicity that would speedily make it the sensation of the day.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MR. SEVERNE-HARTLIEH.

MR. HARTLIEH and the physician, both of whose addresses the detective had taken down in his memorandum-book, had followed the latter to the street.

And, more to Castlemaine's secret satisfaction than Mr. Hartlieth could have any idea of, he was overtaken by that gentleman when but a short part of the distance to Police Headquarters with his prisoner-patient under his protecting wing.

"Ah, by the way, Mr. Castlemaine," said Mr. Hartlieth, "I'd like to accompany you briefly, if you have no objections."

"None whatever, sir," replied the detective, with unaffected heartiness. "Come right along. Only I should think it would be something of a bore, following such a thing up, for a gentleman of leisure like you."

Mr. Hartlieth was fairly and not altogether unfavorably known to him by reputation, as, indeed, the murdered man had also been.

"But then, there is the novelty of the thing for you, of course."

"Sir, if a novelty, it is an excruciating one, for me," interposed Mr. Hartlieth, apparently with not a few traces of his original agitation. "That I am deeply, intensely interested in the outcome of this tragedy is true; but more than that—sir," his voice breaking, "Major Rorston was my friend, my intimate friend."

"On my honor, sir, I beg pardon."

"'Twas nothing—nothing. If I can only aid you, in the remotest degree, in bringing the perpetrator of this foul deed to justice—ah, well, I shall be grateful, if not content."

"Heaven grant that you may, sir!" said the detective, warmly. "You were then long intimate with the unfortunate gentleman, I judge?"

"For years, sir, for years."

"And you doubtless had many friends and acquaintances in common, I opine?"

"Many, sir, many."

"Ah, then; and have you not a suspicion as to the identity of one or another of these mysterious veiled ladies—for the crime was committed by one of them, I feel positive."

"Not the faintest, sir, not an inkling! Good Lord! if it were otherwise, do you fancy me capable of withholding it from you, you know?"

"No offense, sir."

"Oh, no, of course not. Ahem!" clearing his throat. "You see, sir, Major Rorston had his little private affairs, perhaps his little private troubles, apart from even his most intimate friends, along with the best of us, and there were certain delicate points on which we held to radically different principles. Especially in a man's relationship with women was this difference of opinion—but what am I saying? The man was my friend—there!"

"Say no more, sir; I think I understand you, Mr. Hartlieth, and in a way that is creditable both to your heart and your head."

"Thank you, Mr. Castlemaine."

"Don't mention it."

"And, by the way, might not this half-witted boy here"—Jemmy was dreamily drifting along at his custodian's side, mumbling to himself, and evidently oblivious to everything but his own wool-gathering fancies—"have committed the deed in a sudden fit of frenzy or cupidity?"

"And have locked himself in the wardrobe from the outside, afterward?"

"True, true; how stupid of me! And yet, the cunning of the demi-mad sometimes passes belief; and surely, from some of his first ravings, one would say that diamonds had been displayed."

"You are right, Mr. Hartlieth. Strange that I had not thought of that. This may be worthy of consideration." But, just the same, Castlemaine was furtively studying his massive companion more narrowly than the latter apparently could have any suspicion of.

"Glad to have given you a suggestion, I am sure," continued Mr. Severne-Hartlieth, a little wearily. "Well, well, I cudgel my poor brains in vain for a notion as to who those women could have been."

"If we could know who the first visitor, the young man, was, it might possibly furnish a clew as to the others."

"You think so? I doubt it. But, I have been perfectly certain as to who he was from the first," inoifferently.

"What! you have?"

"Bless you, yes! but he couldn't have had anything to do with the terrible affair. That is," slowly, "I—do—not—see—how—he—could. No, no, scarcely to be thought of!"

"Who was the young man, in your opinion, then?"

"Tom Rashton, quite a young fellow about town."

"Ah; something in the athletic club line?"

"The same, the same. Clever, handsome young rogue, too, and a great spendthrift seeing that he hasn't a shilling of his own. But, maybe it's with other people's. Some fellows can manage this sort of thing; I never could. Here we are at last."

Headquarters being reached, Jemmy was straightway conducted into the presence of Inspector Byrnes; Mr. Severne-Hartlieth standing near, a deeply interested spectator and auditor while Castlemaine gave his details, and his chief likewise made an essay to extract something of importance out of the poor prisoner's incoherencies, with no sort of success.

Then a barely perceptible sign passed between the inspector and his subordinate, and the former said, with well-affected impatience:

"Nothing can be done with this poor creature—at least for the present—Castlemaine. Better let this whole matter rest for the day, while you finish up that forgery case you were on. Then when the newspapers come to air up this affair, they may furnish us with something to go on. As you are going out, send a messenger here, and I will send this boy to Bellevue Hospital for the best and most scientific treatment at once. Something may possibly come of it."

Castlemaine saluted, and then, with a bow to Mr. Hartlieth, withdrew submissively, but with his face indicative of the bitterest disappointment.

"I want a package of cigarettes!" vapidly exclaimed poor Jemmy, for perhaps the fiftieth time, in one form or another, since being taken

into custody. "Look here, why don't you let me buy 'em—two packages—a dozen? See, I have money!" jingling his silver afresh. "And a drop or two of gin or absinthe wouldn't go bad for a change. Don't you see that I've money at last? and haven't I kept the secret, in spite of the way the diamonds blinks and gleamed? But, let me see; was it I that was shot, or the major? Aha, aha! In the morning, by the bright light!" And he was still driveling when the official came to lead him away.

Mr. Severne-Hartlieth remained several minutes longer chatting with the genial inspector, who had never been more genial and interesting than just now, until the office clock, if nothing else, reminded him that he was long past his accustomed luncheon-hour, and, with gentlemanly acknowledgments for courtesies received, he hurried away to his club.

The inspector touched his bell.

"He's off!" he said, as a sleek, well-fed, rather plump individual in sober black, with smooth, rosy cheeks, slick-oiled hair, and a generally smug, obsequious air, who might have been a professional club or restaurant waiter seeking for fresh employment—but wasn't—put in an appearance by the same door by which Castlemaine, the detective, had made his exit. "It won't do for you to lose him."

"Trust me for that, inspector," calmly responded the disguised Guy Castlemaine, and he hastily flitted out of the office.

It was ten o'clock at night when he again appeared at the office, and the chief of the Detective Bureau was once more at his desk to receive his written report of his shadowing of Mr. Severne-Hartlieth up to shortly before that hour.

This was accordingly handed over in silence, after which the "Silent Sifter," as Guy Castlemaine had been frequently characterized by reason of his uniform and often phenomenal success in numerous especially intricate detective cases, retired to resume his accustomed habiliments.

The memoranda, which Inspector Byrnes thoughtfully scanned in the mean time, were as follows:

"Mr. H— took cab at Broadway and Houston street and drove directly to his club, the Empire, where he lei urely lunched. Time, 2 P.M.

"Made friends with head waiter, as a western expert anxious for permanent situation, and got trial job of waiting on Mr. H—.

"When half-through his repast, H— summoned District Messenger boy, and dispatched a thoughtfully scribbled note, probably making an appointment for later on. Note addressed to Mrs. Pauline Delamour, Inverness Apartment House, North Seventh avenue, Harlem. Time, 2:30.

"No answer to note. H— finished his wine-light claret; should judge that he drinks but sparingly as a habit. Also conversed gravely and feelingly with several club friends on the sensation of the day—mysterious murder of Major Clarence Rorston—but without saying anything of his connection with its discovery, a point which the newspapers have also somehow missed. Then took Elevated train for Harlem, I following. Time, 3 P.M.

"H— went to the Perthshire—stunning apartment house, and presently sent out for carriage. Time, 3:30. Came out to carriage, accompanied by two ladies, and lady's maid. Ladies were, as I learned from janitor, Mrs. Pauline Delamour and Mrs. Janet Musgrave, rich widow living in neighborhood. Former, magnificent blonde with extraordinary yellow hair, very tall and stately; latter handsome brunette, and mu h shorter, even over plump, but of most graceful walk; lady's maid vaguely remember to have seen before, but perhaps under different complexion; now a pronounced blonde—too blonde. Party dr ve off. Nothing unusual. Central Park—Riverside drive—back :t 5 P.M.

"H— returned t' club for dinner alone. Then went to Piccadilly to inquire after affair—7 P.M.

"H— then dropped in at the ballet at Niblo's; dropped out again, and then to his rooms; modest bachelor apartments, West Twentieth street. Time, 8 P.M.

"Here he received visit from woman disguised as man. This woman and Mrs. Pauline Delamour one and same. She remained but twenty minutes, and was then whirled away by hack in which she came. Time, 8:20.

"H— seemed troubled. Went alone to Dalzell's gambling hell. Is there at this last writing (9:30), bucking roulette, and in fine luck?"

### CHAPTER IV.

#### CLEWS.

THE inspector had just about finished the careful perusal of the foregoing memoranda when Castlemaine reappeared before him, minus his disguise.

"Pretty well!" he observed. "I see you italicize the stately tallness of the one lady, and the graceful shortness of the other?"

"Yes, inspector."

"In allusion to the veiled visitors upon the gentleman who was done for, I suppose?"

"A suggestion in that direction, inspector, that is all."

"You think that they might be the same?"

"I think it just possible."

"The lady's maid you allude to as vaguely remembering to have seen before."

"Yes; Mrs. Delamour's maid."

"And you can't place her?"

"Not yet; but it will come to me in time."

"Both these ladies are in the fashionable swim, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; away up."

"What do you know of them respectively?"

"Mrs. Musgrave is a widow of excellent family, rich, honored, respected, but deemed a little outre, or ultra-independent, chiefly by reason of her fondness for horse-racing, and her rather exclusive chumminess of late with the magnificent blonde of the wonderful head of hair, La Belle Delamour."

"Whose credentials are perhaps less irreproachable?"

"The alleged widow of a wealthy French or Belgian financier, and vaguely rumored among the *ton* as a possible adventuress, but," with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "somehow having the *entree*—the unchallenged entrance, you understand. And with regard to these two ladies, there is something more."

"What more?"

"Mrs. Musgrave is the lady who was robbed of the fifty-thousand dollar diamond parure at her Newport residence early last summer."

"Such was the name, to be sure; I thought it might be another Mrs. Musgrave, that is, if I thought of it at all. Anything more?"

"Yes. The supposed thief was the lady's maid—one Sally Brown, a handsome young English woman, but swarthy as a Gypsy, which she might have been, for that matter—who disappeared at the same time that the jewels did."

"I recollect. But this seems somewhat irrelevant to our murder case."

"Wait, inspector. La Belle Delamour was one of Mrs. Musgrave's guests at the time."

"So!"

"And so was the Hon. H. Digby Severne-Hartlieth, the towering Englishman—doubtless the Delamour's *cavalier servant*, or—privileged admirer, we will say—at the present time, and an acknowledged diamond-broker and connoisseur by the gentlemanly profession."

"Ah, we are getting there! Who the deuce is this Englishman, anyway?—an adventurer, of course?"

"Doubtless, but somehow in the swim with the tip-tops."

"He's big enough to be anything."

"And strong and clever enough, too. An all-around man of the world—swordsman, pigeon-shot, weight-putter, jockey, boxer, and all the rest."

"So!" with a smile; "though perhaps you could give him a point or two with the gloves."

"Well, inspector," and Castlemaine threw a quietly complacent glance down over his extremely slender but athletic frame, "I never say no to a friendly bout, as you are aware. Besides, young Rashton, I have heard, more than held his own the other night with the giant Englishman at the Athletic Club."

"Rashton! Likewise somewhat mixed up with Major Rorston's mysterious visitors, eh?"

"By mere accident. A thoroughly inoffensive good-fellow, I am quite sure."

"Now as to the murdered man himself?"

"Oh, I have had him down dead to rights for a long time."

"Who and what was he?"

"Of tip-top connections, but many shady, little-known antecedents. A coldly selfish monster, a club man, a whist-player unpleasantly noted for uniformity of success therein, and suspected of being secretly a professional blackmailer of women—mostly those in the highest circles."

"Well, this will doubtless prove more and more interesting."

"If we can only sift the thing out."

"But you are the Silent Sifter, you know."

"Thank you, inspector," modestly. "Perhaps—if you will pardon my saying it—I might have tracked those Newport diamonds, if I hadn't been sent into the case at the tail end of it."

"Like enough, like enough! Yes, Peters made a sad bungle there, and even the Pinkerton vaunters were at fault. However, there's the suspicion of a diamond-twinkle even amid the blood-red of this new affair, it seems. Diamond-brokering—that cigarette fiend's jabber of diamonds among his other incoherencies—however, we shall see."

Here an attendant entered and laid before the inspector a visitor's card.

The chief glanced at the address with a little approving nod, and passed it to Castlemaine, who likewise seemed pleased.

"Show the gentleman, Biggler."

A prepossessing young gentleman of twenty-six or eight—a typical New York man-about-town of the better sort—entered, and nodded gravely to the inspector and his subordinate.

"Mr. Rashton, I believe?" queried the inspector, with an encouraging smile.

"Yes, that's my name, inspector," replied the visitor; and then he plunged into his business with praiseworthy directness: "Inspector, I am in no little mental distress"—he looked it—"and I am here to relieve myself of it, as being the most up-and-up, honorable and straightforward course to pursue," with a somewhat shy glance in the subordinate detective's direction.

"Speak out unreservedly, Mr. Rashton," said the inspector. "It is rather late, but I am at your service. And this is Mr. Castlemaine, in

charge of the Rorston murder case, in whom you can place the most implicit confidence."

"Ah, thanks for the pleasure!" with an off-hand bow. "I have heard of Mr. Castlemaine before. Here's the rub, then, inspector. Of course, I've read all the evening-newspaper reports of this terrible affair, together with no end of club and other gossip about town. Who the poor major's mysteriously veiled lady could have been, shortly before the discovery of the deed, of course I have no idea. But his first visitor of this morning was doubtless myself."

"That is something at all events. Thanks, in return, for your frankness, Mr. Rashton."

"Well, perhaps my visit had nothing to do with the affair—of course it couldn't have had directly. But I thought it might furnish you with a suggestion, see? Gentlemen," Mr. Rashton was growing somewhat warm, "it's hard to have to speak evil of the dead—worse than all of the foully and freshly-murdered—even when the evil is the truth. But what is a fellow to do? Tombstone paregryics and epitaph-twaddle won't answer when getting down to hardpan fact, as you know."

"Certainly not, Mr. Rashton."

"Gentlemen, Major Rorston was an infernally cold-blooded, cowardly, blackmailing bound! and my business this morning with him was by no means of a friendly character."

## CHAPTER V.

### TOM RASHTON'S STORY.

"YOUR frankness is commendable, Mr. Rashton," said Inspector Byrnes. "Pray, give me your story unreservedly."

"Well, I'll do so," and the young man accepted a proffered arm-chair near the inspector's elbow, while Castlemaine looked on interestedly, "even if it should attract suspicion against myself," with a short little laugh, "though I hardly think that possible."

"Not possible at all, sir," observed Inspector Byrnes, yet more encouragingly. "Set your mind wholly at rest. We have known, or guessed, of your identity with the first visitor to the unfortunate gentleman's apartments almost from the first."

"Oho!" somewhat surprised. "From whom could you have got the suggestion, if it is a fair question?"

"From Mr. Severne-Hartlieth."

"Humph! from that English elephant? But I might have anticipated it, seeing that he was the first to make the terrible discovery. But look here, this newspaper talk of Hartlieth having been a bosom friend of Rorston's is all gammon, my friends!"

"He said so himself," remarked the inspector, "for, of course, he was here. I could only take him at his word, pending fuller information."

"You have it now from me. There had been business transactions between them—the polished rogues!—no doubt. That is undeniable. But latterly the two men have been bitter enemies. That I know—every one does in our set."

"This is interesting, Mr. Rashton; though, of course, Hartlieth could hardly have committed the murder himself."

"No, no; not to be thought of. Body already cold when he discovered it, and all that. Though that's not saying but that he might have been capable of it on occasion," with a look of intense dislike. "By Jove!" in a sudden outburst of frankness; "I visited the man myself this morning with the determination of having his life, or—something else. Think what you please of me for confessing it, gentlemen. Though, very fortunately for me, as it now appears," meditatively, "I got the something else."

"An open confession is good for the soul," observed the inspector, with another of his inviting smiles from behind his great mustache, for there was something superlatively engaging in this young fellow's half-boyish impulsiveness. "But we are waiting for your story, you know."

"True, true! Of course," with a look of nervous appeal, "what I shall say with regard to my strictly personal affairs will be received in confidence, as between gentlemen?"

"Absolutely so," with a grave inclination of the head, while Castlemaine also nodded.

"Good! here goes, then. Gentlemen, there is a certain young lady that I think a vast deal of—in fact, more than any other young lady I ever saw, or ever expect to see—though, mind you, there isn't any engagement between us—not the ghost. Which isn't the same as saying that I wish there was," regretfully, and with an ingenuous flush.

"The young lady is the adopted daughter and prospective sole heiress of one of New York's wealthiest citizens—not to say, one of New York's most incorrigible, curmudgeonly old cranks, into the bargain—and I am without profession, without vocation, and without a dollar, save what I can pick up out of billiards and whist."

"There you are, gentlemen. That," with his frank, short laugh, "explains the situation in the first part, as the lawyers would say, doesn't it?"

"Quite sufficiently so," the inspector took it upon himself to reply.

"Well, about a week or ten days ago," Rashton continued, "I chanced in the oddest way to overhear fragments of a certain conversation. Under what circumstances I did so need not be set forth; but I simply could not well help myself, and I am neither by nature nor inclination an eavesdropper."

"No need to tell us that, sir."

"Ah, much obliged, I am sure. The conversation in question was between Miss Blanton—Dash it all! her name has escaped me, after all. As well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, though. The young lady of my admiration is Miss Nelly Blanton, old De Wolfe Blanton's adopted child and heiress, and some do say the old chap's absolute tyrant, as well. Which might well be so, spite of the old fellow's crankiness—for Miss Blanton is just a seraph in petticoats, and no mistake—unless he should hear of her preferring a suitor somewhat happy-go-lucky, and without a dollar to his bank-account, of, say, about my size and shape; when I doubt not that even she would have to look out for domestic breezes in the throne-room. Heigh-ho!" And this decidedly negligent story-teller philosophically produced a cigar-case and ignited a weed, after offering one to each of his auditors.

They had nodded understandingly to keep up to his mark, for the beauty and accomplishments of the young lady alluded to, together with her despotic rule of rich, eccentric old De Wolfe Blanton's household, were a feature of New York's upper-crust society.

"Well, sirs," continued Tom Rashton, "the conversation I allude to as having heard accidentally, was between Miss Blanton and Major Clarence Rorston, the man found murdered this very morning. And thereby hangs yet another little side-issue, I am sorry to say; for if these digressions continue my story will like enough see the sun rise on an unfinished tale.

"The major, you see, was a sort of nephew by marriage of old Blanton's, and might, perhaps, have been his recognized heir-at-law, but for charming Nelly having, through no fault or design of her own, stepped in between him and his prospects. Beginning to understand, eh?"

"Gradually," laughing. "I'll gladly help you out, if you say so."

"By Jove, I wish you would!" quite earnestly. "I never was worth a cent at telling a story."

"Good, then! This Major Rorston was something of a blackmailer, was he not?"

"Something?" indignantly. "Curse him! he wasn't anything else!"

"Well, well; he may have got hold of certain of Miss Blanton's letters or papers, perhaps affecting her domestic relations, or even her inheritance itself."

"He did, he did! Bless me! how could you know that, inspector?"

"No matter; I am simply a good guesser, that is all. The young lady probably pleaded for the return of these letters, we will say, and, in vain?"

"Exactly!—almost groveled to the base, cold-blooded brute, and was refused repeatedly, refused with taunts and sneers!" And Tom Rashton struck the desk beside him a fierce blow with his athletic fist.

"Let me go on, if you please. And your early visit to the major's rooms in the Piccadilly this morning was to demand the withheld papers in her behalf. Am I right?"

"Yes, and at the revolver's muzzle—though," quickly, "I had not ventured to let the young lady know of my determination to interfere, you understand, which would have been to confess my reluctant eavesdropping to her—something I wouldn't have done for the world. Good Lord! she is that high-minded that she might have cut me dead from that time out."

"Well, well; you secured the papers from the major?"

"I did!" complacently. "He turned white and came to time when I cornered him, with the muzzle of the weapon clapped to his accursed head. However," grudgingly, "it might have been different had I given him a better chance. Scoundrel as he was, Rorston was no ordinary coward."

"Now to the point, Mr. Rashton. You doubtless agree with the theory, do you not, that one or another of the veiled ladies, whose visits followed so closely upon yours, was the author of the murder?"

"Oh, yes," promptly; and then, more slowly: "It certainly looks like it."

"Have you any idea as to who those ladies were?"

"Not the slightest. But look here, there's something else I want to say that might furnish a hint, or suggestion, in that line."

"Shall be glad to hear it, I am sure."

"You may have thought it odd how Rorston could have got those letters of Miss Blanton's into his possession in the first place?"

"Yes."

"He stole them—stole them from her aunt, Mrs. Jane Musgrave."

"So the dashing widow is the young lady's aunt?"

"Certainly; and very fond of her; and would doubtless have adopted her before old Blanton died, but that she wasn't such a rich woman in

those days—when Nelly was a mere school-girl."

"When and where did the abstraction of the papers take place?"

"Early last summer, and at Mrs. Musgrave's Newport villa. Rorston was one of the guests there, for the scoundrel went into the best society—a sort of buzzard in a dove-cote—which he used for his own purposes."

"Why, it was there and about that time that Mrs. Musgrave lost her diamonds!"

"Just so; at about the same time; though, of course, Miss Blanton did not know of it till considerably later on."

## CHAPTER VI.

### YET A NEW SUSPICION.

"WERE you likewise one of Mrs. Musgrave's guests, Mr. Rashton, if the question is not impertinent?" inquired Castlemaine, speaking for the first time during the interview.

"Altogether pertinent," replied the young man, pleasantly. "Yes: I was there—though off and on, visiting Miss Blanton when I could, you understand: she being there, with old Blanton, as one of her aunt's permanent guests."

"The disappearance of those diamonds created quite a stir."

"I should say so."

"And they have never been recovered."

"No; I believe not."

"What is your notion as to what became of them?"

"Oh, the prevailing one—that Mrs. Musgrave's maid, the Brown young woman, made off with them, as a matter of course. She disappeared at the same time that the jewels did; though it is strange that none of you detectives have ever been able to track her down."

"Why strange?"

"Well, she was so out of the common appearance, for one thing. So very comely and yet so very dark—quite the ultra Spanish Gypsy in style, you know, which she possibly really was in race, for that matter. I have thought so more than once," meditatively.

"And you really think that this young woman must have been the thief?"

"Oh, yes: don't you? At least, I have never thought of any one else in the criminal connection."

"Mrs. Pauline Delamour was likewise a guest there at the time, I believe?"

"She was that, by Jupiter!"

"And Mr. H. Digby Severn-Hartleth, also?"

Both queries were sufficiently suggestive, and they touched the spot as nearly as could be wished.

Tom Rashton again struck the desk with his fist, and his frank face grew troubled and stern.

"True, true! and adventurers, both of them, I make no doubt, with Rorston into the bargain," he exclaimed. "Strange that I never thought of these people before in this connection! and now a flood of thoughts and coincidences come rushing in upon me. Look here, there are certain things that you gentlemen ought to know."

"In the first place, and perhaps altogether apart from Miss Blanton's abstracted letters, it was rumored that there was a secret chief attraction for Major Rorston being down there at Mrs. Musgrave's villa at that time.

"Can you guess what it was? No, I don't believe you can. Sally Brown, Mrs. Musgrave's maid! There you are. As I said, the young woman was eminently handsome, though so unusually dark. By the way, the major himself was a blonde, as you may have noticed—lighter than I am, in fact—and rather the reverse of bad-looking. Do you begin to twig?" A nod from his listeners, as he stared at them knowingly. "That's it. The vague rumor that there was something between those two—that there even might have been a clandestine marriage between them."

"Between Major Rorston and the swarthy lady's-maid?" cried the inspector.

"Yes; rather wild, eh? However, apart from his suave rascality, the major was an odd fish. Not a ladies' man, by any means—sane to get at their secrets and black-mail 'em when he could, I suppose—with hardly a genuine love-affair to his credit—in his own circle, I mean, of course—during his forty-odd years of more than fast life. Just the sort, as I have noticed, for such a mesalliance as was rumored, should the right fascination chance along. And the Brown woman would have been a magnetizer for some men, otherwise cold-blooded enough, I can tell you. Follow me? I see you do."

"However, myth or truth for that rumor, it didn't prevent him from pursuing her round about the wild, lovely spots of Cragsby—that's the name of Mrs. Musgrave's Newport place—though perhaps more to sound her as to old Blanton's testamentary intentions than anything else—until she grew positively afraid of him, and even told me about it."

"However, after I had playfully taken him by the collar and threatened to throw him over the Black Cliff, he was much more reasonable. Still, I wasn't quite satisfied till I had presented her with a pair of breech-loading derringers, with

instructions as to their use in case of further annoyance, and I not at hand to protect her. She'd not have hesitated, either, let me tell you; for Miss Blanton could be a mighty determined and gritty young woman on occasion, I am sure. But, fortunately, there was never any occasion for anything of the kind."

"So much for all that. Now here is another thing I ought to divulge. I wasn't in Major Rorston's presence ten minutes before I compelled him to hand over those letters. But in the course of that brief interview I detected him in snapping shut a morocco case, that had been lying partly exposed on his writing-table, and transferring it to a secret drawer. But before he could quite do so I got a glimpse of its contents."

"Gentlemen, that case was a jewel-case, and it contained a complete parure of as fine a set of diamonds as I have perceived for many a long day."

"Now, I wouldn't undertake to even hint that those jewels might have been Mrs. Musgrave's missing diamonds. Though I have seen her wear them many times, I couldn't possibly have identified them—being no connoisseur—in the brief glimpse that was afforded me of the contents of that morocco case; though hers disappeared with their case, as I have understood. And, moreover, I do not forget that Major Rorston was a regular dealer in diamonds—he and Hartleth having had many partnership transactions in that line before they fell out; so that those I saw might well have been gems legitimately in his possession in the course of his business."

"However, the matter now comes back to me, in connection with what I have said about Sally Brown, and all that sort of thing, and—well, I just don't know what to think, and give it to you, gentlemen, for what it may be worth."

He looked at his watch.

"Well on to midnight!" he exclaimed; "and to think of how I have perhaps robbed you fellows of your regular rest. I must be off."

"Pray don't tear yourself away," observed Castlemaine, with a smile. "The advantage may have been altogether on our side, and remember what you said about as well to be killed for a sheep as a lamb. There's always time for business here."

"That is true, Mr. Rashton," put in the inspector. "Pray, tarry at least another moment or two."

They had both listened with assumed indulgence to the really important disclosures and suggestions which had been so ingenuously made to them, but with the same prime thought, or perhaps suspicion, in the mind of each that was now about to find expression.

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr. Rashton, carelessly resuming his seat, hat in hand. "I merely feared I might be boring you past endurance."

"Nothing of the sort," said the inspector, pleasantly, at the same time taking something out of a drawer. "Mr. Rashton," and he fixed his kindly but penetrating gaze steadily upon the young man, "you say you gave a pair of breech-loading derringer pistols to Miss Blanton?"

"Certainly."

"Was there any peculiarity about the weapons, by which you could know one of them again?"

"Yes, the butts were inlaid with silver, and prettily chased with quite a unique design. I had possessed them for a long time."

"Might this have been one of them?" And the inspector suddenly produced in his open palm the weapon that Castlemaine had found behind the lounge on which the murdered man had been found stretched out.

Rashton started violently the instant his eyes rested on the weapon, a sudden terrified or bewildered look coming into his face; and then, partly recovering himself, he bent over to examine it more closely, with the evident design of concealing his agitation.

"No," he said, hoarsely, but otherwise with perfectly restored nonchalance; "hardly the faintest resemblance. Good-night, gentlemen. By the way," laying his card before the inspector, "here is my address. That is," with a forced laugh, "if you haven't found it out beforehand—you detective sharps mostly do." And he forthwith took his departure.

"He recognized the pistol," calmly commented the inspector, returning the weapon to its drawer.

"Undoubtedly," replied Castlemaine. "Still, you can't think for a moment that Miss Blanton was—one of the vailed women?"

"He has a terrified suspicion to that effect, at all events; which might help us along to something, anyway. It is bed-time."

"True enough, and I shall have another string to my bow by to-morrow."

They then separated.

Mr. De Wolfe Blanton was a childless, and some said a decidedly crabbed, old widower who was apparently fond of little else in the world but his political club, his money, his domestic establishment, and his adopted daughter, Nelly Blanton, who to all appearances ruled

that establishment and its master at her own sweet will.

They occupied a large old house and grounds in upper Fifth avenue, Harlem, where Mr. Blanton had vast real-estate interests.

A few doors away was the rich Mrs. Musgrave's handsome and more modern residence, and the Perthshire apartment block, where Mrs. Delamour lived, in upper Seventh avenue, was also not far distant.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A BOLD MOVE.

EARLY in the afternoon of the following day, Castlemaine, very becomingly attired and looking at his best—which is saying enough, for he was a handsome fellow, of gentlemanly and attractive manners—rang the door-bell of Mr. Blanton's house.

He had been making certain external observations previously.

He had waited, for instance, until he had seen the old gentleman quit the place, probably for a visit to his down-town club, where he was well known as an influential and assiduous member, and until pretty well assured that Miss Blanton was disengaged within, besides drawing certain other conclusions of his own as to the service of the establishment.

His ring was answered by a maid-servant, instead of a footman, as might have been expected, and, rather pleased at this outwardly insignificant circumstance, he asked for the young lady, and sent in his card.

Miss Blanton entered the reception-room, into which her visitor had been shown to await her response, with his card still in her hand, and a curious, half-troubled look in her face.

"Mr. Castlemaine?" she queried, with an unassuming courtesy that at once won upon her visitor, who had risen with a grave bow in response. "Pray be seated again, sir," herself sinking into a chair. "Of course," with a pleasant smile, "your name is new to me; unless—" she looked up quickly and interestedly—"I may have seen it in the newspapers quite recently?"

"Very likely, miss, and in connection with the Rorston tragedy. I am the detective Castlemaine, who has charge of the case."

A charmingly handsome and self-poised young woman of twenty-one or two, tall, svelte, composed, unassuming, of no particular complexion or hair, perfect taste in dress, and with a frank, easy, attractive generosity, or even democracy, of manner—a typical well-bred New York girl—such was the young lady whom the detective's quick eyes and experienced judgment now made mental note of for the first time.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, sir," said Miss Blanton, conventionally. "To what may I owe the honor of your visit?"

"To my connection with that very case, ma'm," replied Castlemaine, with no less directness.

Miss Blanton opened her fine eyes to their fullest extent, her face taking on a puzzled look.

"But what can I have to do with it?" she inquired. "Of course, I knew the unfortunate gentleman—he was of my set, or circle, as we have come to say in our somewhat snobbish New World pretensions—and I was becomingly shocked, I hope, at learning of his tragic death. But that is all."

"You can have something to do with it, Miss Blanton, if you will," said the detective. "You can even assist me in discovering the murderer."

"I?" with unmitigated surprise.

"I feel assured of it, ma'm; and for that reason I have taken the liberty, the very great liberty, of paying you this visit."

"Oh, no great liberty at all!" a little impatiently. "If on business, why shouldn't you call on me as well as on any one else. I am not kept away in cotton or a bandbox," smiling. "So now just tell me what I can do for you, Mr. Castlemaine."

"Without reservation?"

"Altogether so. I hate reservations, and believe in directness."

"I am glad to perceive that, Miss Blanton. It will facilitate matters. But I warn you beforehand that I have quite a lengthy story to tell."

His manner was most agreeable, besides being profoundly respectful, and the young lady inclined her head complacently.

"If it is interesting, I shall not complain," she replied. "Fortunately, I have no prior engagement for to-day, and the last novel I bought is intensely stupid. So pray proceed, Mr. Castlemaine."

He did so forthwith, giving her a detailed account of Rashton's visit to the chief's office the previous night, and everything that was there said and discussed with photographic fidelity.

Miss Blanton evidently found the story something more than interesting. But even if she found it startling at times, she listened absorbingly, and without a single interruption.

"All this is truly most extraordinary, sir," she said at last.

"It is, miss, indeed."

"There are some things in what you have said that I find it hard enough to understand."

"Naturally enough, miss."

"That is, I can appreciate Tom's—I mean Mr. Rashton's motives in making the disclosures that he did. He is generously impulsive, and must have felt it as a sense of duty."

"A splendid young fellow!" cried the detective, with purposed enthusiasm; "incapable of a thought not noble, and, as we poor professionals say, without a wrong hair in his head. But pray forgive me, Miss Blanton," confusedly. "I—I should not have been so unnecessarily impulsive, myself."

"Nothing to forgive or excuse, Mr. Castlemaine," genially, and her eyes said more than that—were positively tender by this time, in fact. "But tell me, please, why did the inspector show Tom—Mr. Rashton that pistol at the last?"

"It was the weapon with which the deed was most likely done, miss."

"Of course, I understand that, for I have read the newspaper accounts. But what had that to do with Mr. Rashton's disclosures (or rambling talk, perhaps, poor rattlebrain old chap!" with an indulgent little laugh) "to you? That is what puzzles me."

"Well—ahem!—you see, miss, he had—had mentioned the fact of having presented you with a pair of derringers."

"Certainly; so he did."

"And this weapon in our possession, this presumably fatal weapon—ahem!—is also a derringer."

Miss Blanton understood at last. She suddenly sat bolt-upright in her chair, her eyes widening with an astonished stare, her cheeks, though, rather flushing than paling.

"Good heavens, Mr. Castlemaine!" she exclaimed; "it can't be possible that, from all this, you suspected me of being the—the—one of those mysteriously veiled women?"

"Not for an instant—not for the wildest, remotest atom of time!" all but roared the detective in the anxious promptitude of his disclaimer. "That is, I didn't, and Inspector Byrnes, my chief, is certainly no more of a fool than I am."

It was not so much relief—in fact, it was sufficiently obvious that, apart from her first amazement, she had nothing really to be relieved of—as grateful acknowledgment that Miss Blanton's face and manner betrayed in response to this impulsive disclaimer.

"Thank you, thank you!" with a little laugh. "It was altogether too absurd. But wait a minute. What did Mr. Rashton say and do, on being asked about the pistol?"

"Merely that it bore no resemblance whatever to the pair which he had given to you."

"Ah, of course!" lightly. "It would have been strange, indeed, if one of my derringers should have been put to use, especially so long a time after I have lost them."

"What, you have lost the pair he gave you?"

"Yes," thoughtfully, "and quite unaccountably, too."

"How was that, ma'm? You will pardon me, if sometimes over-abrupt in my inquisitiveness?"

"Say nothing," smiling. "Isn't it your profession? In fact, I've often thought I'd like to be a detective myself—or a reporter, or a custom-house spy, or something of the sort. I think I am naturally of an inquiring mind."

"You'd make a success in either case, ma'm," gallantly. "You've both the requisite nerve and perseverance."

"How do you know that? But about those ridiculous pistols; for it was ridiculous in Tom—in Mr. Rashton giving them to me at all. As if I couldn't take care of myself without—but no matter. They were pretty things, to have such a deadliness of design, and they were in the prettiest little rosewood case—pretty enough for one's traveling toilet-case—and I lost them, missed them out of my room at my aunt's, you understand, on the very next day after his presenting them to me."

"But Mr. Rashton cannot have any knowledge of this?"

"Not the slightest. I never had the courage, or frankness, to tell him of my carelessness in losing his present, absurd as it was, so soon after accepting it. It might have seemed indifference or worse on my part, you know. At all events, young men are apt to be so—so easily offended in such things, especially when—when thinking themselves rightly expectant of more considerateness," slightly coloring. "But they were gone, and, to tell the truth, Mr. Castlemaine, apart from the kindness that had associated itself with the gift, I was not sorry for it. Being a woman, I hate firearms, of course."

"Still, you might not hesitate to use one, if pushed to an extremity? or, so I should judge of you."

"You mean if a man were to grossly insult me, and with no other means of protection?"

"Yes."

"Then, of course, I would shoot him on the spot," quite indifferently. "But I am really glad," her mobile face lighting up, "that Tom—Mr. Rashton could detect no resemblance in the pistols. It might have been so—so embarrassing, had it been otherwise, you know."

"Of course. Then your pistols were doubtless stolen?"

"Or taken—let us say taken. At all events, they disappeared, and I have been secretly glad of it ever since. There!" with a movement indicating a weariness of the subject.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### AN IMPORTANT ALLY.

"BUT, Miss Blanton," continued Castlemaine, deferentially, "I hope you will not greatly object to my continuing the subject of the pistols just a little further."

"Oh, no," resignedly. "Go on, please."

"You will presently agree with me in renewing your interest in the matter."

"Well, then?"

"Let me ask you first, if it was before or after the diamond robbery at your aunt's villa that you missed the pistols?"

"Before," reflectively. "Considerably before, I think."

"And before or after Major Rorston's abstraction of those letters of yours from Mrs. Musgrave's custody?"

"How can I answer that? I never knew of their being in the major's possession at all till eight or ten days ago, when I vainly demanded them in the conversation which Tom—oh, pshaw! Mr. Rashton—seems to have fortunately overheard."

"Fortunately," after a slight pause, "since, though without any authorization on my part, he seems to have got them back for me so considerably, and without using any actual violence at that."

"You have not seen Mr. Rashton to-day, then?"

"Not yet; though he will doubtless be along presently. He perhaps fears—foolish fellow—that I shall be displeased, or deem him to have been over-officious in the matter."

"That is just about it in my opinion, ma'm, about the way he feels, I mean. Then you yourself never made any demand on the major for the letters, other than at that one time, or visited his rooms?"

"No, sir; decidedly not!" coloring a little angrily. "I to visit any gentleman in his rooms, indeed!"

"Forgive me."

"Still," coldly, "I can not see why you should ask me such a question."

"I am coming right to it, ma'm. Mr. Rashton undoubtedly did recognize the fatal weapon as one of those he had given you."

"What?"

"Without a doubt."

"But you just intimated exactly the reverse."

"No, beg pardon, but merely that he intimated the reverse."

"I have never found Mr. Rashton to be untruthful."

"He was agitated. The inspector and I are accustomed to judge of a man's thoughts quite as much by his manner as by his words, and at times even more so. We failed not to draw our conclusions in this case."

"But why should Mr. Rashton's words have expressed one thing, his manner the reverse?"

"I shall be even brutal in my frankness. To shield you from a possible suspicion on our part, which, however, we did not for a moment entertain."

Suddenly the truth of the strange situation flashed upon her, and she turned pale, though the more with grief or anger it would have been hard to say.

"You think, then," she said, in a strangely altered voice, "that he—Tom—Mr. Rashton deemed me capable of having been one of those veiled creatures—of having possibly committed that murderous deed?"

"No, no; he was simply bewildered and thunderstruck—perhaps much as you yourself are feeling at this moment, ma'm. He doubtless merely feared, in a sudden panic, that we should deem it possible. Surely you can understand this, without condemning the young man?"

"Well, perhaps that is somewhat better."

She arose and paced the floor, much as a man might have done under similar stress of feeling; but with an unconscious floating womanliness of grace, which together with her superb though slender queenliness of figure and the absorbed thoughtfulness and trouble of her lovely, yet strongly characterized face, could not but challenge her visitor's unreserved admiration.

"What do you wish me to do, Mr. Castlemaine?" She paused turning abruptly upon him with vehemence. "Speak right out. I am not like many other young women of my favored surroundings. At all events I hate being beaten about the bush with. I want to be talked with and consulted as if I were a man. Why are you here, and what do you want?"

"Your assistance, even your co-operation if possible, in verifying the murderer of Major Rorston."

"But I am not a detective."

"You said you would like to be one."

"You are very clever, Mr. Castlemaine," with a short laugh.

"Not so clever as your woman's wit might be, shoul i you choose to assist me with it. And I swear to you that I do not say so as an empty compliment. I am speaking to you now as you desired—just as if you were a man."

"Thank you, then." She resumed her seat. "Then let me do some questioning on my part."

"With all my heart!"

"You suspect one of those veiled women to have done the killing?"

"I do."

"So do I; and I am glad we agree in that; for it lets Tom—there! I shall let that go hereafter—out of the line of suspicion, at all events."

"But you surely wouldn't deem it possible in his case?"

"Why not? He has done me the honor to suspect, or half-suspect, me; and I am of the sort that strikes back. None of your resigned kissing of the rod for me. It may be meek and holy and christian, and all that, but it is either unnatural or hypocritical, and I will none of it."

Castlemaine rose to make a profound bow, and then resumed his seat, saying, with evident heartiness:

"My own sentiments to a dot. Miss Blanton, for both men and women. This turning of the unsmitten cheek for the second blow is nothing more than offering a premium for insult; and I love my neighbor when he loves me, and not otherwise. Not a word you have uttered but I can sincerely applaud!"

"Tom is excitable, you see," she went on, a little excitably herself. "As for the pistol, the major himself might have stolen the pair of them originally, and this one might have been lying temptingly in sight. One would scarcely require a superlative temptation in dealing with a professed blackmailer. Then those women-visitors, they might merely have hurried away, dumb with fright, after discovering the murder accomplished."

"A creditable theory, Miss Blanton," smilingly—"highly creditable for a beginner in our profession. It has one trifling flaw, however."

"What is that?"

"You yourself do not believe a word of it."

Miss Blanton acquiesced, in the first genuinely hearty laugh that Castlemaine had heard her utter, and which he found in melodious keeping with her fresh, unaffected charms of person.

"Which," she asked abruptly, "of the veiled women do you most suspect as having done the deed?"

"The second visitor of the two in point of time; though I am by no means settled on this point."

"She was the taller and statelier?"

"Yes."

"Have you a suspicion as to her identity?"

"Let me ask you a question or two, before I answer yours."

"As you please, Mr. Castlemaine."

"What do you think of Mrs. Pauline Delamour?"

"Frankly, a woman whom I both distrust and detest cordially; though my aunt, Mrs. Musgrave, seems to be strangely and lamentably taken up with her. And I have reason to believe that my dislike is reciprocated in full."

"And the lady's friend, the Hon. Mr. H. Digby Severne-Hartlieb?"

"I don't know. He can be very agreeable and gentlemanly, though Tom is sure he is an adventurer. I won't say for my own part, though I would think better of the gentleman if he were less 'English, you know.' The name alone is—is too ultra-British for my taste."

"But a fondness for everything English is all the fashion nowadays, especially with young people in such circles as yours."

"Count me out of date, then, if you please," quietly. "The Star Spangled Banner is quite good enough for me."

"Miss Blanton, I suspected that last and statelier veiled visitor to Major Rorston's rooms in the Piccadilly—his possible murderer—to have been Mrs. Delamour. Listen."

And he forthwith narrated, in detail, every incident of his preceding day's experience.

Miss Blanton not only listened with the profoundest attention, but evidently felt greatly complimented by the confidence placed in her so unreservedly.

"This is all very remarkable," was her primary comment when he had finished. "It must be very interesting and exciting, this detective work."

"You shall have the opportunity of experiencing it."

"Might I really be of service to you?"

"Unquestionably."

"And that brazen woman really visited Hartlieb in masculine disguise?"

"Yes."

"Dear me! what could she have done with her hair?"

"That struck me, also, as a poser; but she managed it somehow."

"You see, Mr. Castlemaine—but I can trust you with a secret—a somewhat delicate one, too, I hope?"

"Implicitly."

"I—I once or twice in my own experience—

some years ago, you know, before Mr. Blanton adopted me—did that."

"Did what, ma'm?" staring.

"Went dis—disguised, you know," blushing, "and not as a woman."

"Ah, to be sure!" with a placid indifference that at once restored her composure. "Well, you are tall enough to have succeeded admirably."

"Still—well, it was brazen in Mrs. Delamour; and to visit a gentleman's rooms as such!"

"I should say so."

"Tom must be right; that woman can't be anything but an adventuress."

"And a dangerous woman, to say nothing of her doubtless being Harlieth's confederate in the diamond business."

"Ah, yes; if we could only be sure of what became of Aunt Janet's diamonds! And there was that ugly rumor about Major Rorston and Gypsy Sally, gloss it over as they may. Well, Mr. Castlemaine," resolutely, "what would you have me do?"

"You formally enter into league with me in this thing, then?"

"Yes."

"Both your aunt and Mrs. Delamour visit you here occasionally, I suppose?"

"Not only that, but often. In fact, I am rather surprised that they have not called yet today."

"It will be necessary for you and I to see each other almost continually, and without formality."

"I see that."

"I noticed that you have no footman."

"Not since last week; and he was our only man-servant; our coach and horses being at a livery-stable."

"Has your man-servant, when you have one, very much to do?"

"Almost nothing."

"Suppose you let me do it for him?"

Miss Blanton clapped her hands, her eyes dancing at the novelty and adventure of the thing.

"Agreed!" she exclaimed. "You will find John's last new livery hanging in his room, which I will direct you to. It belongs to the establishment and ought to fit you to a nicety."

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### CASTLEMAINE IN LIVERY.

TWENTY minutes later, upon Castlemaine presenting himself to Miss Blanton, after a brief visit to the former footman's rooms according to her directions, she at first burst into a merry laugh, and then nodded her more serious approval.

In fact, the livery fitted him even better than she had predicted, and this, together with a smug, flunkeyish, and rather conceited expression, which he had attained through his mimic art, and an expert use of the hair-brush and certain cosmetics, rendered him outwardly about as much of a success in his new role as could be well conceived.

"Capital!" exclaimed the young lady, already fully enlisted into the novel spirit of the thing. "But what is your name?"

"'Enry, mum," was the reply, in a solemn, unctuous voice.

"You have been out to service before?"

"Yessum; and with the very best recommends from the highest and mostest haristocratic succles."

She burst into another laugh, when a ring was heard at the street bell.

"Tom Rashton's ring!" she exclaimed. "Now is your initiative chance, Henry. And you are to begin to play the spy by eavesdropping everything that passes between us."

"You mean it, miss?" incredulously.

"Of course I do. We must make a beginning in our secret compact somewhere. Go on!—Here, Mary," stepping into the hall with him, as one of the servant-maids was hurrying past, "this is Henry, our new footman, who will henceforth attend to the bell."

The girl stared and disappeared, while "'Enry" ceremoniously opened the door to young Rashton, who was too intent upon seeing Nelly without delay to give him more than a passing notice.

It was a long and rambling story that Nelly then had to listen to from her admirer, though she dared not venture to risk her designs by admitting to him that she was receiving it at second-hand.

However, Tom was overjoyed to find that she was not displeased at anything that he had done, which was the chief point that he had been apprehensive about.

"Tom," said Miss Blanton at last, "I not only do not think that you have been over-officious, as you seem to have unreasonably feared, but I'm sure that you have been very honorable and even heroic. Thank you over and over again! Now give me the letters, please."

He did so, and he watched her strangely while she looked them over before putting them in her bosom.

It was easy to see that, however much or secretly they might like each other, there had never been anything positively lover-like between them as yet.

"It's mighty odd, Nelly," observed the young man, with a certain constraint in his voice and manner, of which he was perhaps hardly conscious, "that you should never have told me before of your having lost those derringers."

"Well, I just didn't like to, Tom."

"And you haven't any idea who could have appropriated them?"

"Not the remotest."

"Nelly," almost painfully, "my heart was just in my throat when I recognized one of them in Inspector Byrnes's possession last night."

"Did you?"

"I don't see how you can be so cool and quiet about it."

"Why not?"

"By Jupiter, Nelly!" almost savagely; "knowing your spirited temper as I do, I almost feared for the moment that you had killed Rorston with your own hand."

"Thank you!" icily. "And are you quite sure, on your own part, that you only threatened the scoundrel with violence?"

"Good Lord! what do you mean, Nelly?"

"Well," even more freezing, "Rorston may have been the one who appropriated the derringers; he was capable of it; one of them might have been injudiciously, temptingly on view when you entered his room, and—"

"But I threatened him with a revolver; I even have it on my person now."

"Ah-h-h!"

Tom Rashton sprung to his feet.

"By Heaven, Miss Blanton! you couldn't really think me guilty of that deed?"

"Perhaps as readily and justly, Mr. Rashton, as you could deem me guilty of it!"

"Well, perhaps I had better be going, Nelly?"

"Must you, Tom? Well, you doubtless know best."

They touched hands at parting, it was true, but the restraint that had arisen between them was not diminished in the least.

"Why did you do this, Miss Blanton?" exclaimed the disguised detective, as soon as he had disclosed himself from where he had been overbearing all that had passed.

"I thought it better so—to, perhaps, further the end toward the truth," she replied, bowing her head. "Was I not right?"

"Yes, yes, most probably. But then you really like the young man, and you can no more really believe him capable of that crime than he can believe it of you!"

She raised her face, which he now perceived to be filled with suffering and anguish.

"Oh!" he cried; "you have done all even at the cost of a breaking heart!"

But Nelly had already mastered her suffering, in great part.

"It will all come right," she cried, with a piteous little smile. "Meanwhile, should a true detective complain, if the goal of truth be finally attained, or even brought nearer than before?"

Castlemaine could only testify to his approval of this self-immolating heroism by an obeisance that was most earnest and profound.

Then the bell rung again, and he had to announce two more visitors—who proved to be Mrs. Musgrave and Mrs. Delamour, who had arrived in the former lady's carriage, after which he again sought his post of secret observation, in obedience to previous instructions from Miss Blanton.

"You have got a new footman, I noticed, my dear Nelly," was almost the first thing that Mrs. Musgrave said, after the greeting kisses had been exchanged; "and an uncommonly good-looking one at that."

"Yes, aunt," was the composed reply; "Henry is newly engaged, but I have not thought to notice his looks, one way or another."

Mrs. Delamour laughed cynically, but without provoking more than a single look of scarcely masked contemptuousness from Miss Blanton.

It was quite evident, from a few timid indications here and there, that all three ladies were equally full of the leading topic of the hour, and yet, as if by tacit consent all around, it was scarcely touched upon.

"We are off for a two hours' drive, Nelly," said Mrs. Musgrave at last, "and Mr. Severne-Harlieth is presently to join us in the Park. Then to-night we are to have my box at the opera. You are to be one of us, on both occasions, my dear; so get yourself ready at once. The gown you have on is a charming one."

"For neither entertainment to-day, aunt," Miss Blanton firmly, but kindly, replied to the invitations. "No, pray don't urge me, Mrs. Delamour. Another engagement. You will find me adamant," with a laugh.

"But you will come with us for the races tomorrow, Nelly," pleaded Mrs. Musgrave. Though short and over-plump, she was a very pretty woman, good-natured to a degree—a decided brunette—and charmingly dressed, though less splendidly than her stately blonde companion. "Think of it—Preakness and Dandelion in the opening run, and any number of other favorites."

"Can't promise, aunt," with another laugh. "You know I care far less for the sport than you do. However, I will let you know by messenger before noon to-morrow."

The gay visitors had to content themselves with this—for Miss Blanton was known as all but an eccentric in always meaning just exactly what she said, and sticking to it—and, after the customary chat and lingering at separation, they finally rose to go.

In doing so, Mrs. Delamour's back hair caught something in the upholstery of her chair, and was then all down and about her.

The mishap was speedily remedied, with the help of a pier-glass and deft fingers, but not before the extraordinary beauty of the untrammeled hair had been displayed—yellow as the yellowest gold, and rippling in crisp, wonderful abundance far down below the fair owner's waist.

#### CHAPTER X.

##### CASTLEMAINE'S NEW EMPLOYMENT.

"You heard and saw, of course?" queried Miss Blanton, somewhat curiously, when the disguised detective had promptly come forward after the visitors' departure.

"And reflected not a little also, ma'm," was his amendment in response.

"Which were you most surprised at, now—the odd fact of their hardly daring to venture a word upon the murder topic, or the prearranged accidental exhibition of La Delamour's magnificent hair for my especial envy—not a new trick of hers by any means?"

"As for the wonderful hair," replied Castlemaine, smiling, "will you let me say just what I think of it first?"

"Certainly."

"I do not think it much more abundant than your own, and, as for its beauty, it's a pity that all that glitters is not gold."

"Well, Mr. Castlemaine, I will not think that you are flattering me," said Miss Blanton. "But if you really think that Delamour's hair is not her own, you are 'out.'"

"I didn't alude, ma'm, to the genuineness of its quantity, ma'm," blandly, "but its color, its rare glitter, ma'm."

"What! not that it is dyed?"

"Exactly, miss; I never mistake."

Miss Blanton, cordially disliking the Delamour, was enough of a woman to feel additionally friendly toward Castlemaine after this, even though his penetration was greater than hers in detecting a deceit that she would only too gladly have first discovered without his aid. But of such a strange compounding is woman-kind.

"And as for their fighting shy of the Rorston horror," continued Castlemaine, quietly, "you'll find them keen enough on that scent later on, when the freshness of the thing will not seem in such ill-keeping with their uninterrupted pleasures."

"I think you must be right," replied the young lady, thoughtfully. "And to think that Pauline Delamour may have been that man's murderer!"

"May have been, yes, but only that," said the detective, significantly. "However, Miss Blanton, have you never had a certain associative thought in that direction?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Castlemaine?"

"A thought," he looked at her keenly, "that the first, or shorter-veiled visitor, who might equally have been the doer of the deed—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Might possibly have been your aunt, Mrs. Musgrave?"

Miss Blanton started, and only with difficulty recovered her composure.

"Yes," she slowly admitted, "but only for a single instant, and then to be conclusively discarded. Ah! do not let us think of such a terrible thing, Mr. Castlemaine! Besides, there was no sort of a quarrel between Aunt Janet and the major."

"None that we know of! However, I willingly put the thought aside, Miss Blanton. But let me tell you this, and frankly. You are taking to detective work with amazing rapidity, and as if to the manner born."

Here there was heard a heavy step ascending the outer stoop, and the detective hastened to resume his menial character.

"It is like enough the master, mum," he said, obsequiously. And, the bell ringing just then, he started for the hall.

"Ah, I had forgot all about Papa Blanton," exclaimed the young lady. "But I'll manage it somehow."

"Papa Blanton did not prove very difficult to manage. He hemmed and hawed a little, eyed the new domestic critically, while saying that he had half-determined to dispense with a manservant altogether by reason of the expense and unnecessary style for a plain household, but finally succumbed rather gracefully to a kiss from his adopted daughter, and allowed that he would submit if the new domestic proved to be worth his salt, and his recommendations were all right.

"'Enry" proved his expertness at the dinner table, and in divers other duties, besides speedily making himself highly popular below-stairs, and then, Mr. Blanton retiring early after his custom, hurried down-town, still retaining his livery, to report to the inspector.



The detective told Miss Blanton of as much of his experience as he thought she ought to know, and then said:

"There is much to be ventured and learned at the Perthshire. I shall try it again in my own good time."

## CHAPTER XII.

### LETTING THINGS QUIET DOWN.

AFTER this Castlemaine continued along the even tenor of his footman's employment in Mr. Blanton's household, giving general satisfaction by the respectful and conscientious performance of his humble duties, but apparently so apathetic so far as the prosecution of his detective case was concerned as to cause at last no little impatience on Miss Blanton's part.

This seeming inaction lasted nearly an entire week, when the young lady finally summoned him to one of their consultations with a generally vexed and troubled air.

"See here, Castlemaine," she said, with the freedom and familiarity which had naturally grown along with their continued confidential relations, "how long are we to remain thus, doing nothing in our case?"

"But we are doing something all the while, ma'm," with a smile. "And in the mean time things are having a chance to settle and quiet down, so as to enable us to work along without exciting any one's suspicion."

"Indeed! But I thought I was to help along the work—to be a sort of detective, too."

"You have been helping it along more than you imagine."

"What! By merely going a-pleasuring nearly every day with Aunty Janet and the Delamour and Mr. Hartlieth—persons I detest more and more, those last two!—on your advice?"

"Exactly, and at the same time gleaning all you can as to their respective frames of mind or suspicion, or so far as they may betray themselves to your penetration."

"That hasn't been much."

"More than you think. Let me just recapitulate, for instance, some of the points that we have made during this week of seeming inaction, and chiefly or wholly through your perseverance and cleverness.

"In the first place, we know now, beyond reasonable doubt, that Hartlieth and the Delamour are man and wife—something that we certainly did not even so much as guess at the outset.

"In the next place, we can guess the cause of their keeping the matter a secret, even to the extent of living apart, as enabling them to prosecute their associated depredations upon society—chiefly in the way of diamond swindles or actual thefts—to a securer advantage.

"Again, we have learned, or all but learned, that if the missing Sally Brown stole Mrs. Musgrave's diamonds, it was undoubtedly at the instance of this precious pair, who doubtless even now retain the jewels in their secret keeping.

"We have found out that *perhaps* both the Delamour and dear jovial Mrs. Musgrave secretly suspect one another of having actually fired the fatal shot that deprived Major Rorston of his exceedingly improper life. That, in fact, this mutual suspicion is really the secret of their intensified close-companionship of late—a charming hypocrisy—each being equally unwilling to let the other go free of herself, through fear of possible consequences. Though, of course, the one that knows herself to be guilty—whichever it may be—is playing the deeper and more dangerous part of the two.

"We have discovered that Hartlieth is preoccupied with some new scheme, growing doubtless out of the murder, in which he is most probably plotting with his wife for some unexpected stroke of treachery against Mrs. Musgrave.

"We have discovered from Mr. Tom Rashton—whom you caused to return to his allegiance, at my suggestion—that Hartlieth is getting in bad odor at the clubs, through a growing suspicion of his systematic cheating at short-cards, which implies that money is growing scarce with both him and the Delamour.

"We have succeeded in keeping dear old Mr. Blanton, your adopted father, in an excellent good-humor, and without a suspicion of our innocent partnership in our detective work.

"And we are, not to specify further, infinitely better and more intelligently equipped for our task than we were at the outset. All, or nearly all, achieved through your quiet cleverness and diplomacy. And yet here you are, miss, complaining that nothing has been done."

"Thank you, Castlemaine," said Miss Blanton, who had listened a little pleasurable to the complimentary form of his words. "But then—well, I want to be a real detective, you know; and I thought there might be more real life and movement and adventure in the undertaking."

"Ah!" with a smile; "you doubtless pine for the hair-breadth escapes, the whistling bullets, the glistening knives, the lightning transformations, and the breathless midnight suspense with detective work of the Vidocq-Gabonion-Du Bois-gobey school?"

"Well, yes," and Miss Blanton burst into her

clear laugh; "something of the romantic sort, I confess, my friend."

"All moonshine—or nearly all, my dear young lady. Real-life detective work is a much quieter and more prosaic business, I assure you—with rare exceptions."

"I wish that ours might be a little exceptional, then—just a little, you know, to warm the blood in one's veins."

"Or freeze it, perhaps."

"Well, yes, even that, then, rather than monotony, nothing!"

"Be content. You shall have both, and ere long, or I am greatly mistaken."

"What, Castlemaine?" her color coming, her eyes sparkling; "you promise me adventure, too—real adventure?"

"Yes; sooner or later."

"Glorious!"

"But you find you have been accomplishing something, during this week's seeming humdrum of monotony?"

"Yes, yes; I suppose so. And you?"

"Well, perhaps I have been doing more than you have given me credit for."

"Oh, I haven't really thought you apathetic for a moment, Castlemaine! Only there have been times, of course, when—But tell me," with her bright smile, what have you been doing, Castlemaine?"

"Only following up my original vein, of course."

"And that was—?"

"Making love to Justine Parret," gravely. "And you need not be shocked, Miss Blanton. By to-morrow morning I may have a surprise for you."

"You won't give me a hint beforehand?"

"Couldn't think of it. You will remain home this evening? allow me to ask."

"Yes," with some slight color. "Tom is coming, and even at the risk of meeting, and thus offending Papa Blanton. I thought it might be as well now as later on."

"Excellent! Wait, please. You have never yet had the opportunity to discover whether your aunt has the mate to that derringer pistol in her possession?"

"No."

"She will be out this afternoon, should you see fit to call. The Delamour and she are booked for the Art Loan Exhibition."

"I shall manage it."

Castlemaine had even been applying himself so closely and painstakingly to his role in the character of Mr. Blanton's man-servant, as to sleep in the house o' nights, and only snatch an occasional off-hour to run down to report to the inspector.

The foregoing brief conversation had taken place soon after the luncheon hour, on the eighth day following the eventful morning of our story's opening.

And shortly after Miss Blanton had gone to visit her aunt's house, at his suggestion, the detective set out for his call upon Justine Parret.

As he was about issuing from the house, however, a voice called timidly after him, "Sir! sir!" and he turned to encounter Mary, the parlormaid, just coming into view, and greatly confused.

She was a modest, somewhat reticent young woman, and her manner now was sufficiently suggestive. While making himself pleasantly popular with his fellow-servants—three in number and all of the gentler sex—Castlemaine had been honorably, even punctiliously, circumspect in all of his relations with them, as being due, not only to himself, but to his profound respect for Miss Blanton.

"What is it, Mary?" he demanded, eying her keenly. "Tell me at once."

"Oh, but it's only you, Mr. Henry, and—and—"

"And you evidently thought it was some one else? Come!" his suspicions increasing, and not caring if he did forget his studied abuse of the aspirate for the time being; "you need not be afraid of me. Who was it you mistook me for?"

But she was more or less afraid of him, and hesitated more painfully than ever.

Suddenly an idea, or conjecture, flashed across his mind.

"Let me help you out," he said, sternly. "You perhaps mistook my movements for Mr. Hartlieth's."

Hartleith had called once or twice of late with messages from Mrs. Delatour concerning projected pleasures or expeditions for the following day.

"Yes, Mr. Henry; that is—" she was bowing her confused face and nervously twisting the corner of her apron hem—"I thought he might have been speaking with my young lady, and—and—"

"Miss Blanton is gone out. You are alone here with me. Have no fear, I say," in his most kindly manner. "Be perfectly frank, and your secret shall be perfectly safe with me; otherwise you will compel me to suspect you of some dishonesty."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A FRESH COMPLICATION.

"OH, no, Mr. Henry; not that, not that!"

His powerful nature was already asserting itself strongly over her. "Indeed, indeed I was not going to do it. I—I was even about to tell him that I didn't think it right—that he must take back his money."

In corroboration, she helplessly held out her partly open palm, disclosing a five-dollar gold piece.

"Now you must tell me everything," said Castlemaine, gently. "I am glad that you were about to prove yourself honest and good. Look at me, my dear. I don't appear like the man to betray your confidence, or make trouble for you, do I?"

"No, no, Mr. Henry; you are so good and kind, you always are." Here she began to cry a little.

"Mr. Hartlieth gave you this piece of money? Answer me freely; I mean nothing but for your welfare my child."

"Yes—yes, Mr. Henry."

"When?"

"The last time he was here—as he was quitting the house, after speaking with my young lady—just as you were about to do."

"And for what purpose?"

Without directly answering, she produced from her apron-pocket a rolled-up sheet of stiff blank paper and a pencil.

"So!" with a swift surprised look, "I begin to understand. Well, Mary, for the money that Mr. Hartlieth gave you, and with this paper and pencil, you were to do—what? Not," seeing that she was again trembling and hanging down her head—"not to draw him a plan of the house here!—Trust me implicitly, and fear nothing."

"Yes, sir," falteringly; "of the ground-floor—if—if I should be able to make the drawing, sir."

Castlemaine reflected for a moment. Here was an implied criminal intention—a vulgar house-breaking—which he would hardly have believed such a cosmopolitan rogue as Hartlieth capable of. But wait; could it be an ordinary housebreaking in contemplation, after all? Mr. Blanton was known to live plainly for so rich a man as he; to possess but little valuable plate, or anything of that sort, to habitually make even insignificant payments by bank-check; and Miss Blanton's jewelry was neither abundant nor especially valuable. There were a dozen other residences in the immediate vicinity whose interiors would have offered greater temptation to organized burglary, which invariably informs itself beforehand as to the prospective booty in compensation for the risk incurred. Then suddenly an illuminating thought broke upon him. Miss Blanton's letters! Might not Hartlieth have known of and suspected their importance—of whatever nature that might be—no less than the blackmailer Rorston, now dead? The illumination is neither perfect, nor wholly satisfactory, but it would answer for the present.

"Will you do just as I advise you in this matter, Mary?" said the detective, with increased kindness.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Henry, indeed I will," replied the girl, with evident sincerity, and a long breath of relief. "I—I have felt so unhappy, sir; and I really was going to give back these things and the money to him, sir, indeed, I was! What a man, sir! So beautiful, and towerin', and splendid dressed, and agreeable—and maybe meanin' all the time to murder us all in our beds and set the house on fire! Oh, I'm frightened just to think of it, though somehow I wasn't at first—only confused and embarrassed like." And she indulged in an unaffected little shivering fit.

"You may well say that, Mary. But you haven't answered me. You will trust me, and do just as I tell you?"

"Yes, Mr. Henry, yes! I swear it!"

"Good, then; you are to keep Mr. Hartlieth's money, and do just exactly what he asked you to do for it."

"The girl looked up eagerly and inquiringly.

"It'll be a trap for him, d'yee see."

"Yes, sir, yes; an' serve him right!"

"When were you to let him have the plan?"

"This evenin', in the garden, sir, at dusk."

"Good! keep your word with him, and say nothing. Merely pretend to be greatly frightened at what you have done."

"Yes, sir; but I could never do it. Make a reg'lar droring? bless me, it ain't in my capacities to do it, sir."

"Give me the paper and pencil."

She did so, and, flattening the sheet against the smooth wall, he made a roughly-accurate but purposely irregular and scrawling sketch of the ground-floor plan demanded.

"There you are!" returning it to her. "If he compliments you on your drawing—"

"He hardly will, sir," contemplating the sketch somewhat doubtfully; "it's so scratchy scratchity!"

"No matter; you're to pretend that it cost you much time and secret labor. Perhaps that will mean a fresh tip for you into the bargain. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, yes."

"And you will be true to me in this?"

"Gospel-true, sir! Hope I may be hit dead

if I'm not! But Lor', sir?" wonderingly. "What a strange young man you are to be out at service!"

"I hear the cook calling for you, my dear. Run now, and on your life, do not forget your part."

He looked after her a little doubtfully as she hastened away.

"I am trusting a great deal to that girl—a great deal," he said to himself. "But there was no better way."

Arriving at the Perthshire, with which he was by this time pretty familiar, he found the lonely, unoccupied janitor lounging disconsolately at the first floor elevator-opening, as was mostly his wont.

"Good-morning, Mr. Schneider," greeted Castlemaine, who had not neglected to cultivate the man's good-will. "Still in readiness for the apartment-searchers who never put in an appearance, eh?"

"V'ot else gan I do mit it, Mr. Henry?" was the man's grumbling reply—he was an honest German, sincerely wroth with his enforced idleness. "I ain'd no elefator poy, and yet der brobriotor makes me stay right here, mit only der one abartment oggubied. And der new denants, vill dey effer gone? Not much. It isn't effery-pody v'ot is zo foolish ash to bay seventy-five tollar as Mrs. Delamour do. Oh, Gott Almighdely! I might shooth as vell pe negxd toor dalkin' mit my wife and paby!"

"So you might," sympathizingly. "Some of the landlords are fairly cutting their own throats nowadays. But give yourself a recess now that you have a chance, old fellow. I'll run myself up and down again, as I've done before, besides letting you know when I'm quitting the building."

"You're ferry goot, Mr. Henry. Pe gareful off der machine, dough." And the janitor thankfully drifted away to his temporary liberty, while the detective stepped into the compartment, and, pulling the rope, began to ascend.

Justine was waiting for her pretended admirer at the fourth-floor staging as he stepped out into view.

"Oh, it's you again, Henri?" she vouchsafed to murmur, with a pretense at yawning.

"And why not, Justine?" he replied, with a look of profound concern. "Your mistress is not at home, is she? And you are not growing tired of my devotion, I hope?"

"No, for both questions, stupid! What have you there, fluffed up in tissue paper, like a toy balloon?"

"I've a notion not to tell you, you are so cruelly cross. However, look!"

He disclosed his package—a handsome nosegay, bought at a neighboring florist's—and she sprung toward them, her blonde face lighting up, even her coquetry extinguished for the moment.

"Oh, Henri! for me?"

"For whom else?"

"And you have never given me any flowers before! Yes, of course you may kiss me, Henri. And you won't break my heart with your frowning wickedness?"

"Well, I'll try to only smile and smile, if I must needs be a villain hereafter, my dear."

But, nevertheless, at the entrance to the apartments, Justine stopped him saying, seemingly with unaffected embarrassment:

"You really must not remain long to-day, Henri."

"But madame will not assuredly return from the races till after dark."

"That is true, but—"

"Ah," with sudden coldness and suspicion, "you are perhaps expecting another admirer!"

"No," flushing, "on my honor! Well, then—a little desperately—"come in; but you really must not stay long, as I am very busy, uncommonly so."

He followed her a little incredulously until she was seated in her favorite chair, her face bowed almost out of sight over some pieces of needle-work.

"What, infant's clothes?" he cried, laughing. "Why, surely you are over-sensitive, Justine! A young widow and mother busying herself with her beloved little one's garments! What is there to hide from a man in that?"

Justine had ceased blushing, and was looking at him very gravely.

"Take a seat here by me, Henri," she said, "and I will tell you the secret. These tiny things are not for my little Adolphe."

"No?"

"No; he is in an institution," with a slight quiver in the voice; "there to—to remain until—until I can do better for him."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### CASTLEMAINE'S BOLD DESIGN.

"Poor little fellow!" said Castlemaine, feelingly. "It's an infernal shame! How old is your little Adolphe, my dear?"

Justine stared, but quickly understood.

"Four months," she replied, a little shortly. "Just about the same age as the little boy for which these things are intended."

"And whose kid may this other one be?"

"Kid, mousieur?"

"Oh! baby I mean, of course."

"That," still more seriously, "is madame's secret, not mine."

"Madame's?"

"Yes."

"Your mistress's?"

"Yes. Belonging to a protege of hers. You understand?"

"Ah! I suppose so." And the footman-detective emitted a long whistle half under his breath.

"Henri!"

"...stine."

"...nted before, I am very busy this af-te... did," with a laugh; and Castlemaine rose.

"But you are not offended, Henri; and there is a half-bottle of claret for you in the place you know of. I've had mine."

He laughed good-naturedly, playfully cracked her under the chin, and then unceremoniously wandered back through the finely-appointed apartments in the direction of the buffet, as he had done more than once before.

He had determined to conceal himself upon the premises that very night, after ascertaining that Madame Delamour would most likely be at home, with Severne Hartlieb as her only guest. It was absolutely necessary, he thought, that he should overhear one of their private conversations, if he was to arrive at the truth of the mystery that was continuing to baffle him so tantalizingly. And, moreover, here was this new design of Hartlieb's upon the Blanton premises, as a fresh incentive to the expedient, though he could not think that such design, if existing at all, was on the immediate threshold of fulfillment. He had, indeed, already selected the place in which he meant to conceal himself. It was a small, unused cabinet-like room, between the drawing-room and the dining-room, with a larger chamber (Mrs. Delamour's own bed-chamber) across the narrow communicating passage directly opposite, and having a small window looking out upon the chief private hall of the suite, by which he intended to gain access to its interior at the appropriate time. There was but one communicating door, which opened into it from the narrow passage alluded to, and this was mostly locked, while there was likewise a small curtained window looking from it both into the dining-room and the parlor from either side.

Now he took occasion to notice that the door of this little room was slightly ajar, and therefore obtained a peep into it, Justine, who was sewing in the parlor, having her back turned to him at the time. Everything seemed propitious for his scheme. The little den only contained two or three empty packing-boxes, while the floor was thickly covered with untracked dust, indicating that it was seldom, if ever, entered.

He gayly drank the blonde lady's-maid's health in the half-bottle of red wine that she had so considerately left for him, and then, after a few parting words, took himself off.

"You may call again to-morrow afternoon, Henri, if you are very good," the young woman called after him, but without accompanying him to the elevator, as had been her custom.

Castlemaine took advantage of this omission to make certain surreptitious explorations of the lower part of the building, which had long been in his thoughts.

Accordingly, on descending to the first floor, the janitor still being conveniently absent, he stepped softly back through the handsome tiled hall, with the intention of taking a look into the cellars. Madame Delamour had the privilege of a compartment there, he knew, for the storage of her coal, and there might be other of her belongings there worthy an investigation.

The stairway leading down below was quite dark, though (the elevator car could not be made to descend below the first floor, for some reason), and when he stepped out into the comparatively light cellar passage—which received a modicum of dayshine from a grating at either end, the compartment or bin-doors being ranged along on either side—he was greatly surprised at being suddenly confronted by a strange man.

He was a pale young fellow of about his own size, very poorly dressed—almost like a tramp, in fact, though not uncleanly of appearance—and, moreover, he seemed the far more startled of the two at the unexpectedness of the encounter.

"What are you doing here, my man?" demanded the detective; and quite brusquely, too, considering that he had no legitimate business there himself.

"You—you are not the janitor, I hope?" stammered the young man, with a curious look at his questioner's livery.

"No, I am not," replied Castlemaine, much more kindly, for he was beginning to guess the situation.

"Nor—nor the proprietor, I should say?"

"Nor the proprietor, either. I have been visiting the only tenant in the building—high up—and just thought to take a little general look around on my own hook. Now, young

man, since I've vouchsafed to be frank with you, suppose you return the compliment. Who and what are you, and what are you doing here?"

But still the strange young fellow did not answer directly.

"I haven't asked who *you* are, or what *you* are doing here," he said, somewhat sullenly.

"If you were vested with authority to question, I should answer fearlessly as I have done. I am an honest man."

"I'm not," bluntly. "There's the difference."

"It's outspoken, anyway. Pray answer my question."

"But, according to your own showing, you are vested with no more authority to question than I am."

"Don't be too sure of that," angrily. "I am a law-abiding man, at all events, and hostile to all evil-doers."

There was a hard ring in the detective's voice, and, in a possible physical encounter, the other, who appeared very weak and emaciated, would have stood no chance whatever. But, instead of manifesting any fear, the latter merely eyed his athletic adversary with an eager wistfulness that somehow touched his sympathies.

"I wonder if I can trust you!" he said, huskily.

There was no gentler-disposed man than Guy Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter, when directly appealed to for sympathy with distress.

"Yes, you can," he answered, heartily.

"There is my hand on it." The young fellow only touched the extended hand, and then burst into tears. A violent tremor, also, had suddenly come upon him, so that he had to lean against the whitewashed wall for support.

"Don't think me a milksop," he faltered. "I'll be better soon. But you see when a chap hasn't eaten a square meal for a week—"

"Try to tell me your story in as few words as possible," interrupted the detective, taking his hand.

It was simple and touching, as told. The young man had arrived in New York, penniless but honest, from a distant town a week previous. He had early fallen in with two strangers, young men like himself but apparently in better circumstances than his own, who had treated him well, while promising to secure him in honest and supporting work. They had mixed with a crowd following a street pageant. Then there had suddenly been a hue and cry of "Pickpockets!" and his companions had started to run. So did he, in a thoughtless panic, fear lending such wings to his heels that he had distanced the policeman and crowd in his special pursuit. While recovering breath, he chanced to thrust his hand into his pocket, only to encounter something which had been slipped in there without his knowledge. It was a gold watch and chain, doubtless the stolen property whose loss had instigated the hue and cry against his thievish companions. Flinging it from him, he continued his flight. The open entrance of the Perthshire had seemed to promise a temporary refuge at least. He had made his way to the cellar, and remained in hiding there ever since, only stealing out at night to pick over the garbage barrels, or he might have starved outright.

"Where and how have you slept down here?" demanded Castlemaine, when the story was told.

The outcast weakly led the way into one of the empty compartments, and pointed to a chance-collected pile of straw and shavings in one corner.

"Wait here for my return," said the detective, and he forthwith bounded away.

He was lucky in escaping observation, and quickly returned from a neighboring "delicatessen" shop with a supply of bread, cheese, cold meat and a couple of bottles of beer; which the poor youth gazed upon as if scarcely able to believe the evidence of his senses, before attacking them with famishing avidity.

"Try and stick it out for another night," Castlemaine observed at parting. "After that I shall be able to do something more definite for you. You will promise me this?"

Receiving a grateful affirmative, he hurried away—for it was growing dusk—thinking no more of the Delamour compartment, and without having even learned his *protégé's* name.

It was in the line of near destiny that he should never know it.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### MISS BLANTON'S DISCOVERY.

RETURNING home—for the Blanton mansion was at least his temporary home—before the old gentleman was back for dinner from his downtown club, the mock-footman was met in the passage by Miss Nelly, who had been anxiously awaiting him, and whose changed face at once showed him that she had most likely made some unpleasant discovery.

"What is it?" he asked, with even more than his accustomed gentleness. "Ah! you found the mate to the fatal pistol, then?"

"Yes," she replied, woefully. "Oh, my friend! I can scarcely believe it of my Aunt Janet! Yet, who knows what bitter, what stinging and maddening provocation she may have received from that unprincipled man? See how meanly and exasperatingly he treated me."

"True, true," consolingly; "but let us not jump at unhappy conclusions. The pistols might have been in poor Mrs. Musgrave's possession on that fatal morning, and she yet be innocent."

"You think so?" eagerly. "How?"

"Oh!—well, she might have merely threatened him, and then left the weapon there in plain view on his table, for the next visitor to snatch up and use against him. But we'll think it over. How did you manage the discovery?"

"That was easily done, as, of course, I have the entire freedom of Aunt Janet's house, even when she is absent, without it being thought anything unusual by her servants."

"Certainly."

"Well, I found the remaining weapon concealed in her dressing-room, case and all. That is enough. And, hark! there is my father's step."

The detective hastened to open the door for the old gentleman; and then, it being the hour of the parlor-maid's appointment with Severne-Hartlieth, slipped out into the grounds.

Night was fast closing in, and he was just in time to intercept the girl, after perceiving the hovering figure of the Englishman moving off through the trees and shrubbery toward a small side-gate—the Blanton grounds comprised a corner lot, along with several others—by which he had doubtless entered.

"You gave him the sketch?" the detective asked of the girl, in a low voice.

The pale face that Mary turned in the dusk was disturbed with alarm, and yet with a pleased, satisfied look.

"Yes, Mr. Henry."

"Ah; and he was doubtless both rejoiced and grateful?"

She opened her clutched palm, showing a gold piece that was larger than its possessor.

"Good! I congratulate you," coldly. "Go now; and remember that you are to think no more of this than you can help."

His tone and manner were such as to imply, most understandingly, in addition: "For you are now more in my power than his. Take heed at your peril!"

As she hurried away toward the house, Castlemaine turned and followed on after Hartlieth, whom he was just in time to see come in collision with another prowler a little inside of the small gate.

Then the detective, while keeping well back out of sight, though within hearing, smiled as he recognized Tom Rashton's angry voice, exclaiming:

"So, it is you, Mr. Hartlieth? And what are you up to, skulking thus sneakingly about a gentleman's grounds under cover of darkness?"

"The same challenge to yourself, sir!" replied the Englishman, with lazy wrathfulness. "And look ye, my man, I never skulk, and sneaking is a hard word, you know, especially from one who is prowling on his own account."

Epithets passed, then blows, and Rashton sprung at the Englishman's throat.

But, though he might have proved himself a match for his giant adversary in an athletic club boxing bout, with no roped arena, or twenty-four foot "squared circle," to limit his agility in "keeping away," Tom, by making the mistake of his life of coming to close quarters, was little more than a stripling in the colossal Hartlieth's veritable clutch.

He would have been hurled down instantly, had not Castlemaine suddenly and noiselessly slipped upon them from his nook and given the Britisher the foot from behind, which caused the latter to be undermost in the fall which followed.

But it was only for the instant. The Englishman was evidently insensible to fear, a splendid wrestler, and of a scarcely looked-for activity and alertness in conjunction with his immense muscular strength.

In the twinkling of an eye, he had turned his smaller adversary, and was uppermost, while the latter was practically helpless.

Still, as the victor seemed magnanimously disposed, and in spite of the provocation having been altogether on the other side, Castlemaine could not find it in his sense of fairness to interfere again.

"Now look here, Rashton," said Mr. Severne-Hartlieth, almost as lazily imperturbable as was his wont, and controlling the other's athletic kicks and squirmings with but little exertion of his great strength, "I've no fancy for hurting you, you know. The provocation came from you, for I had just as much right in these grounds, and without challenge, as you or any other outsider. So, just say you see it in the right light, my man, and I'll let you up with pleasure."

"See you in—Tophet first!" was the profane rejoinder.

Hartlieth kept him down for another second or two, and then deliberately rose, with a good-natured laugh.

"Oh, well, get up, anyway, then," he said. "You Americans are so blawsted vengeful, while with us Englishmen it's merely a word, a blow, and that ends it. I wish you good-evening and an improved temper, old fellow." And he sauntered away about his business.

Tom had bounded to his feet, on being released, and then stood irresolute, while dusting himself off as well as he could; for, boiling mad as he was, he had sense and manliness enough to appreciate the undeserving indulgence that had been extended to him.

Then, while moving mutteringly toward the house he came suddenly upon the footman-detective.

"Hallo, it's you, Henry, is it?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Rashton."

"You saw that fight, my man?"

"There wasn't any, sir, to speak of."

"You're right," with a laugh. "I felt as if I was being hugged by a grizzly. But what made him go down under at first so unaccountably?"

"I gave him the foot from behind, sir."

"Ah, humph! very good of you, I must confess. But look here!" and Tom pressed closer to look the other more critically in the face; for, more observant than Parlor-maid Mary, the relinquishment of the Cockney idiom, with which Castlemaine had habitually imposed upon most of the household and its visitors, had already struck his notice; "you've suddenly learned good English as only Americans speak it. How is this, my man?"

"'Ow is w'at, Mr. Rashton?" with a peculiar smile in the dusk. "Shouldn't a poor chap improve hisself in 'is hown 'umble way, sir?"

"This won't do, you rogue! Altogether too thin. Come; you've done me a friendly turn, and if you're a fraud I sha'n't expose you—always," sternly, "putting aside danger for Miss Blanton, as a matter of course."

"Fraud, sir—hexpose me?"

"Who are you?"

"Guy Castlemaine, at your service, Mr. Tom Rashton."

The latter stared, couldn't believe it at first, laughed, and then accepted the situation, while scratching his head and staring afresh.

"In the line of business, eh?" he inquired at last.

"Of course."

"And none of 'em so much as suspecting you?" with a nod toward the house.

"None but the young lady. Miss Blanton is my fellow-conspirator."

"Good Lord! you don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do. Now, my friend, it is my turn to question, if you please."

"You've the right to, old fellow; so cut in. But let me tell you how I chanced to be here. I was just dying to get a word or two with Nelly before dinner, when I encountered that chap, and surmised that he might have a similar hope or thought. See? It naturally made me boiling mad."

"And a fool of you besides."

"Go ahead, Castlemaine; I'll stand it."

"You must have a fine idea of Miss Blanton, to suppose that Hartlieth could be here with any such thought or hope."

"That is so," ruefully. "I ought to be clubbed, I know. But it was only for the flashing instant, mind you. And what could he have been prowling here for?"

"For an entirely different purpose, which I must not tell you now. But you would, doubtless, serve the young lady?"

"To the death, old man! But you ought to know that."

"Very good; then do not try to get speech with her now—it would do no good, and the dining-hour is directly at hand—but promise to do just as I advise you, instead."

"But what am I to do?"

"Watch over the house here all night, or, say from ten o'clock till dawn."

"Of course, I will," after a moment's thought, "if there is a necessity."

"There is—a critical one, perhaps."

"Good! count on me. But can't you give me a more definite hint?"

"There's to be an attempt, sooner or later, to deprive Miss Blanton of those unfortunate letters."

"Ha! Hartlieth, then—"

"I can tell you no more; am not yet certain myself."

"Has Nelly been advised of her new danger?"

"No; for perhaps there is none. She shouldn't be needlessly alarmed."

"That is well. But wait; where will you be meantime?"

"Guarding against the threatening danger, or making discoveries elsewhere. Now go. I am expected to wait at table."

"Hang it all! Why doesn't Nelly burn the letters, whatsoever they may import?"

"Give it up. Does a woman ever burn up old letters, no matter what their perilous nature? Are you going?"

"Yes; right off."

"Remember your guard-duty, then."

And, as Rashton slipped away through the gate, Castlemaine hurried back to the house, where he was just in time for his table duties without his absence having excited comment.

Later on he merely signified to Miss Blanton that he might be out unusually late, and took himself off, without having given her the least insinuation of her possible danger, which, notwithstanding his precautionary injunction to Rashton, he had no idea could be close at hand.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HIDE AND SEEK.

IT was between eight and nine o'clock when the detective made his way in at the street entrance of the Perthshire Apartment Building, in a quietly professional manner, but little calculated to disturb the meditations of the most watchful guardian who might have been on duty near at hand.

But the Perthshire was not often very jealously patrolled in any instance, as we have seen, and on this occasion Castlemaine had waited before entering until he had heard the elevator-car ascend with the janitor, and likely enough with a visitor, who might be none other than Mr. Severne-Hartlieth himself.

Then—and, strangely enough, entirely forgetful of the outcast in the cellar, so thoroughly was he preoccupied with his own affair—he quietly ascended by the dimly-lighted adjoining staircase, while the car was in the course of descent.

Waiting on the fourth floor landing until he heard the car being again sent up empty—it being the custom to secure it at the top of shaft, two stories higher up, for the night—and entrance-doors open and shut, as an indication that Janitor Schneider was quitting the magnificent profitlessness of the Perthshire, for the cozier happiness of his domestic felicity, he proceeded noiselessly along the main corridor, and paused at the door leading into Mrs. Delamour's private hall, which had been left ajar, where he listened intently.

The private hall was indistinctly lighted, and he could hear the murmur of voices from the adjoining room, but that was all.

Without more ado, Castlemaine slipped along the little hall, and peered in at the little cabinet room already alluded to as opening from it into the dark little intervening cabinet room.

But this room was not wholly dark now, by reason, as he could see, of the door directly opposite being partly ajar, which admitted some light from the narrow communicating corridor on which it opened.

This was an unforeseen drawback, for as this little sub-corridor terminated in the drawing-room at one end—from which it was separated merely by a portiere hanging, mostly drawn wholly or partly back—and with the dining-room at the other, there was all the greater chance of his projected surreptitious entrance by the little window being detected.

However, the Silent Sifter was not the man to back out now from a game, however desperate, in which he had already made a first deal with the fate-cards, albeit that they were still face-downward, with not the remotest hint as to what his hand might prove—trumps, ruin, or an indifferent holding.

Noiselessly pushing back the little window, he took off his shoes without a sound, and, holding them between his teeth, set about climbing, worming and writhing his way through the narrow opening, hardly drawing breath as he did so, and with all the eel-like craft, slipperiness and expertness of which he had long been a master.

He succeeded.

However, he was just straightening himself up under the window, after dropping soundlessly into the interior, when movements in the adjoining dining-room on his left held him motionless.

Should he risk crossing the floor and closing the door? The risk was too great.

Then steps, the slight jarring of glassware, an opera air half-hummed in a well-known voice, and—there was Justine Parret silently regarding him from the center of the little corridor, a salver with decanters and glasses in her hands, her eyes round-eyed with stupefying astonishment.

Castlemaine, notwithstanding that he made her a pleading gesture, could hardly abstain from an oath of exasperation.

The game was up, as a matter of course.

But no. Justine smiled, shook her pretty little blonde head, pursed up her lips secretly, and, herself noiselessly closing the door against further peril to him, passed on unconcernedly into the parlor, still bumming her little air, with hardly so much as a break.

The detective drew a long breath of relief, secretly blessing the little woman with a fervency that was none the less grateful than sincere.

Not a shade of impropriety, or even actual lewdness, had ever passed between them. Indeed, their intercourse had been confined to a companionable species of "chaffing" one another, in which each had seemed to feel that all the familiarities and tendernesses, exploited on the one part and accepted on the other, were of a mock nature, or being innocently indulged in solely for one another's amusement. This apparent and unexpected proof of the girl's devo-

tion, as against her mistress's interests, and under the decidedly suspicious circumstances, was accordingly all the more appreciated by the spying detective.

In the mean time he slipped on his shoes again, and, no alarm having been given, bent his ear to the conversation that was going on in the adjoining parlor.

Still not hearing distinctly, however, he cautiously mounted an empty packing-box that stood under the small communicating window, and, raising a corner of its curtain at a point where a pane of glass had been partly broken out, speedily obtained an entire view of the drawing-room, besides being able to overhear all that passed.

Hartlieth and Mrs. Delamour were seated negligently at a small table in the center of the sumptuous apartment with their wine before them, Justine having just retired after serving it.

"It is just as I tell you, Herbert," said the adventuress, evidently branching off upon a new topic from one that had thus far been briefly pursued. "Money, money, money! I am owing everybody—getting in deeper and deeper every day, of course—and I can't safely borrow another thousand from the little Musgrave before paying the last she obliged me with. I would make her begin to suspect things, you know; and, pouf! a first suspicion from such a legitimate fashionable plunger as she is, and where would it end?"

"Not to be thought of, Polly, not for a moment," replied Hartlieth, with his languid, indifferent air, that so belied the man's energetic dangerousness of character. "Let things drift along, can't you? We can surely afford to until—you know what." And he refilled the glasses, after which he lazily lighted a cigar.

But La Belle Delamour, though stately, beautiful and wonderful-haired as ever—in fact, the spying detective thought he had never seen her more imposingly and dangerously handsome than just at present, in her rich *negligee* dressing-gown, as she half-reclined in her luxurious arm-chair, an empty wine-glass trifled with by one shapely hand, the costly jewels glistening on both, and the strong gas-light, from the chandelier directly overhead, shedding its unrelied luster upon the thoughtfully poised head with its marvel of golden hair—seemed to be in an unwonted serious mood on this occasion, which no amount of pooh-poohing on the part of her companion could lull into his own happy-go-lucky security.

"But that is all uncertain, Herbert, to say nothing of the risk, the delay, and all that," she continued, "while the money-dearth is immediate and imperative."

"Let it be, I say, Polly. Risk and delay be hanged! There need be neither of any consequence. The girl has her baby here already, you say?"

"Yes."

"And the marriage certificate is producable?"

"Oh, of course; but you haven't Miss Blanton's letters yet."

"Never fear; I'll have 'em to-night. No hurry; all in good time. My only fear is that they'll not be strong enough to ruin her with the old hunks in favor of the poor major's brat."

"Could Rorston have placed such great store on them otherwise?"

"Humph! perhaps not. Well, we shall see."

The listening detective had started, with a certain sense of consternation. So, the attempt upon the Blanton residence was to be made this very night, and he self-immured here in this little dungeon, with only Tom Rorston's guardianship to intervene between Miss Blanton and her peril! However, there was nothing left for it now but to see the thing out from where he was.

"For all that," continued Mrs. Delatour, in the same complaining, or anxious tone, "it will be a tedious and perilous undertaking. Sally, in making the claim on the old gentleman in behalf of her baby—Rorston's own legitimate heir, and consequently Mr. Blanton's grand-nephew—would at once, as a first damper, doubtless be confronted with the charge of having filched Mrs. Musgrave's diamonds."

"Ah, but she did not steal 'em!" chuckled Hartlieth. "There's the beauty of it. Her disappearance was simply a necessity of her interesting condition, while the poor, dear major cribbed the sparklers himself."

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### INTERESTING REVELATIONS.

"Come," thought the concealed detective, at this juncture. "We are getting news. This is decidedly interesting." And he redoubled his attention.

"Well," resumed the Delamour, "all this doesn't let me out of my immediate money troubles."

"Do stow that, Polly, my dear!" interposed Hartlieth. "Haven't I my own troubles of the same kind?"

"Well, I am just getting sick of this sort of life, Herbert, and there's no use disguising it."

"Nonsense! There's always use in disguising things, if it pays. What sort of life d'ye mean, anyway?"

"This life of humbug and pretense. You know what I mean."

"But I find it jolly enough, and so do you, or you manage to counterfeit a liking for it mighty successfully."

"No; exciting and sensational, perhaps, but not satisfactory or truly enjoyable. I wish I was back in England, as your own wife, just as it used to be, instead of our living apart in this heartless, hypocritical fashion."

"Why not wish yourself back still further," with a sneer, "when you were simply Gypsy Polly, the handsome barmaid of the Hartlieth Arms, and before I married you, to be disowned by my family for my pains?"

"Oh, Herbert! how can you?" And Mrs. Delatour gave strong indications of dissolving into tears.

"But you're seeming to pine for it all back," gruffly. "And that notwithstanding what I've done and sacrificed for you—and that scapegrace sister of yours, Sally Brown, to boot."

"Hallo! hallo!" thought Castlemaine, "we're coming out, and maybe inside out. This isn't half-bad."

"Sally hasn't been any scapegrace!" cried the lady, bridling. "If she contracted a secret marriage with a gentleman who was simply too high-placed and too selfish to acknowledge her afterward, she did no worse than I did. And Heaven knows that her poor major paid the penalty, though leaving her helpless and unrecognized, with her little pledge by him."

"And I did acknowledge you, which was the worse for me, on the score of my family connections. And as for Rorston paying the penalty, you doubtless took care that he did, my dear."

The Delatour suddenly straightened up, her eyes flashing (and strange that her eyes, too, should be almost black, despite her brilliantly fair skin!) and her face paling, with something like fear in it.

"Look you, Herbert Severne-Hartlieth!" she exclaimed; "this isn't the first time you've hinted that it was I who fired that fatal shot, and I won't have the insinuation repeated."

"Oh, let it go!" drawled Hartlieth, laughing lazily once more as he refilled his glass. "What's the odds? He was a blasted unprincipled dog, anyway, and you got the diamonds that he was intending to chisel us out of our share in. Let it go."

"But I sha'n't let it go," with mingled anger and fright. "To take the stolen diamonds was well enough, but to have it hinted that I was the scoundrel's murderer—" She stopped, trying hard to recover her composure, but her pallor had increased to positive ghastliness.

"Let be, Pol, let be!"

"At the point where your continued insinuations leave it—never! Must I tell you again that I found the man dead—already shot—and then merely hurried away, after securing the jewels, which you and I had just as much right to as he?"

"No, no; do as I am doing—drop it all, and rest content. Only—"

"Only what?"

"If you didn't pistol him, who did?"

"How should I know? the veiled woman who preceded me as his visitor that morning, I suppose."

"And you would have me believe that that was the fair and fat little Musgrave."

"I have told you only that such is my impression. Of course, she would deny it, if I were such a fool as to hint my suspicion to her."

"Worse than that; cut you dead."

"Don't I know that? And, of course, there can be no proof against her, or that devil's detective, Castlemaine, who has disappeared so mysteriously, would have been tracking after her before this."

"The devil take him!" growled Hartlieth. "Let us hope that some badgered thief has quietly slit his throat."

"With all my heart. But all this doesn't alter my impression; and I want you to share it with me, Herbert," earnestly, "if only in justice to myself."

He shook his head.

"So!" bitterly; "you prefer to think me capable of the murder, then?"

"Not at all—I prefer to think—nothing; and you are just as dear to me as ever, Polly, one way or another. You ought to know that. But it isn't in nature, to my thinking, that the little Musgrave could have fired that bullet."

"Why isn't it?"

"Well, Mrs. Musgrave is a real lady, for one thing—gentle, refined, away bang-up! though, of course, a little too ultra-American for my perverted British taste, you know."

"A real lady!"

"Yes."

"And I suppose, then, that I am something else?" passionately.

"Don't be a fool, Polly. And then, for another thing, there could have been no motive on her part."

"Couldn't there?" significantly. "That is all you know about it."

Then it was Hartlieth's turn to straighten up, though merely with an alert, eager and thoroughly alive look.

"But could she have had one, Polly?" he exclaimed. "Of course, I've only been defending the woman on what have appeared to me purely logical grounds."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Just so," complacently. "But, good Lord! if she may have had a motive, and there's the slightest chance of bleeding her for all she's worth—"

"There isn't any, so don't dazzle your eyes unnecessarily, my dear Herbert."

"But you intimated that she could have had a motive," impatiently.

"I only know what I suspect."

"And what is that?"

"That Rorston purloined certain letters of hers at the same time that he did those of Miss Blanton's at the Newport villa."

"Ah! and that she might have shot him, perhaps accidentally, while compelling him to yield them up. Is that your theory?"

"Something that way."

"Ah, well," sipping his wine meditatively. "In that case, what a pity we couldn't get our hooks on those letters at the same time we're scooping in Miss Blanton's!"

"Better be sure of Miss Blanton's first."

"That's what I mean to be. But, look you, Polly, you ought to manage the others, along with the way you have cultivated the little widow."

"Well, I may think of it."

"Do so. Why, great guns!" and the Colossus's face assumed a fairly rapt expression; "with old Blanton's adopted daughter under one thumb, and the dear fat little Musgrave under the other, how we could squeeze out the ducats! Holy Moses! Why, a fellow grows positively poetic and inspired to think of it. Let me see, Polly, which California money-bog is it whose income is represented by a five dollar gold piece—a bright, solid golden guinea, mind you—falling, chinkity-chink, into a coffer, like the water-drops of a rill, every minute of the twenty-four hours the whole year round, or something like it?"

"Mr. Mackey, I believe."

"The same, the same! and he a low-flung ex-bartender, while I am an English gentleman of the real old aristocratic stock—"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Delamour, with a return of her smiles at last, "and his wife, according to report, an ex-washerwoman, while I am the ex-barmaid of the Hartlieth Arms, but Herbert-Digby Severne-Hartlieth's wedded wife for all that."

"Good for you, Polly," and he laughed loudly, with his own good humor fully restored, if indeed, he had ever lost it.

"But just think of it. Chinkity-chink, chinkity-chink! Drop, drop, drop! Ah, well, if we couldn't quite come up to the ex-bartender, Polly, we could ape him pretty creditably, with the Sally's cub by Rorston acknowledged as old Blanton's sole heir, and the dear little Musgrave's purse-strings opening at our demand, and have a high old time, anyway!"

"That we could, Herbert."

But the poetry in Mr. Hartlieth's otherwise exuberant nature was essentially of an evanescent kind—bright and inspired, perhaps, but fleeting, glancing, dancing, altogether too volatile to last.

"Still, it's all moonshine, of course," he muttered, presently. "There's one thing that could knock all such dreams into a cocked hat by letting out the whole secret of the murder forthwith."

"What is that?" inquired Polly.

"That little cigarette-fiend's recovery of his senses and memory. Of course, he must have witnessed the whole affair."

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### CASTLEMAINE'S PERIL.

MRS. DELATOUR started and paled at this suggestion, an incident which was not lost upon her companion.

"Why, what's the matter, Polly?" he asked, eying her keenly.

"Nothing whatever, Herbert," with her composed smile again. "Why should there be?"

"Oh, nothing!" with his careless laugh.

"Only that cigarette fiend might recover his memory, Polly."

"I don't believe it likely, my dear; though, of course it would make no difference to me, one way or another."

"Of course not. Do you remember the old preposterous melo-drama. Polly, with that hair-raising title, 'The Idiot Witness, or the Tale of Blood?'"

"I believe I do, indistinctly, Herbert. But the preposterousness of the title always struck me as susceptible of improvement."

"In what way?"

"Well, why not Pail instead of Tale, of Blood?"

"Pretty good, and one on me, Polly!" he cried, breaking into his enjoyable laugh. "But, seriously, though, the old play is said to have

been founded on fact, an actual tragedy, you know."

"Ah!"

"Yes; its idiot had his reason restored to him, to the utter confusion of the mysterious villain, and all that."

"Don't you think we might change the subject?"

"With all my heart. Bless me! how talk will drift, eh? What did we start in with?"

"Money, or, rather, a dearth of it."

"So we did. Gad! Well, my dear, you still got your personal jewels to make a raise on, till this new scheme of ours can be hurriedly systematized and then boomed head."

"And have their absence noticed and secretly commented on by every fashionable woman I know. No, thank you!"

"There's such a thing as temporary paste substitutes, you know."

"None so clever but they would detect. These American women are the sharpest in the world. It's not to be thought of, Herbert. But there are those other jewels, you know."

"Which?"

"The Musgrave parure that—"

"Good God, no!" and Hartlieth brightened up with sudden apprehension. "What can you be thinking of, Polly!"

"My pressing impecuniosity, Herbert."

"Won't do, won't do!" he shook his head imperatively. "Not safe for fully a twelve-month yet, and even then they must be dribbled out onto the market, piece by piece and stone by stone."

"But something must be done! What shall I do?"

"Possess your soul with patience and hope, as I do," replied Hartlieth, a little gloomily. "By the way, let us take a look at the beauties, Polly.—But see that we are securely locked in here first."

"I'll attend to that," said Mrs. Delamour, who had already risen, and she went out and shut and locked the private hall-door.

Then, as she returned, there was a sound that caused them to exchange significant glances, and the concealed detective to be doubly on the alert. It came from somewhere far back in the rear of the suite, and was the cry of a babe.

"It's the kid," observed Hartlieth, a little grumbly. "Suppose we see how Sally is looking first."

"Justine!" called out the Delamour, touching a hand-bell.

"That's right," remarked Hartlieth, with an approving nod, which the spying Castlemaine couldn't understand the occasion for. "Keep the thing up, even when we are alone. It's safer."

"I always do," replied the lady; and then Justine smilingly appeared, more or less in *dishabille*, as if she might have been interrupted in her toilette.

"You are getting to be somewhat monotonous, Justine, my dear," said Hartlieth, with his good-natured laugh. "We're pining for a view of Sister Sally." And then they all laughed together, though the detective was still puzzled as to where the joke might be. "She has evidently arrived by this time, eh?"

"Of course, sir," replied Justine. "Didn't you hear the signal?" The infantile wail had ceased by this time. "However, Mrs. Rorston is somewhat fatigued by her journey hither from nowhere, so that you must have a little patience before I can produce her."

Then, as she disappeared, they once more all roared out in concert, to the continued mystification of Castlemaine.

"Now for it, Polly!" said Hartlieth. "We shall have time for a fresh glance or two at the beauties before your precious sister puts in her *bona-fide* appearance."

Mrs. Delamour went to a corner of the large room near the steam radiator, and, stooping down, folded back a large lap of the expensive carpet from where the floor joined the wainscoting.

Then, as near as Castlemaine could make out, she opened some sort of receptacle in the bare floor, and when she arose and turned, she held a red morocco jewel-case in her hands.

"Ah!" chuckled Hartlieth, taking and opening the case, while she seated herself at his side to likewise gloat over its glittering contents; "and who shall say that we are flat broke when we still have these?"

He drew forth a superb diamond necklace, holding it up to the light, and then examined the rest of the parure, piece by piece.

Castlemaine looked on with continued satisfaction, also, from his hidden nook.

From the description alone, which he had had of them long before, he would have known that it was Mrs. Musgrave's stolen diamonds that were thus being displayed so self-confidently by these adventurers, even without what he had overheard respecting them.

"That will do," said Hartlieth, at last. "Put them away again, my dear." He shoved the open case away from him impatiently. "By Jupiter! the temptation might prove too much for me. I seem to see, or feel, a thousand pawn-brokers beckoning at me out of the night, with stacks of bank-notes in their fists. Put them away!"

"Wait!" "Polly" was gloating over the contents for her individual satisfaction now, her eyes glistening, her cheeks flushing. "Ah, if I might only wear them, if just for once! It is not long now to the ball season, and with my new light-blue dress which I am expecting every day from Paris—"

"Yes—and with dear little Musgrave herself at your elbow, wholly oblivious, of course, to the exhibition of her lost sparklers upon your precious person!" interrupted her companion, with somewhat angry irony.

"Perhaps so, but— Oh, Herbert, how gloriously your Polly would queen it just for the minute or two before Janet might recognize them!"

"Put 'em away, I say!"

She did so at last, and then, as Castlemaine had been eagerly anticipating, a very handsome and very dark young woman, with much mock shyness of manner—in other words, Sally Brown, Mrs. Musgrave's erstwhile lady's-maid—came into the apartment with her sleeping baby in her arms.

"Hallo, Sally!" cried Hartlieth, laughingly shaking hands with the new arrival, "and how splendidly you are looking! How are you feeling after your long trip from nowhere?"

Then they all laughed out in concert again in that unaccountable way, just as when Justine, in lieu of the new-comer, had been one of them.

"Oh, I am feeling a good deal like myself, brother Herbert," replied the young mother at last, her white, even teeth flashing prettily between the smile-parting of her red lips. "And my little Clarence, what do you think of him?" painstakingly lowering the little sleeping face under the light for their inspection. "Be careful, though, not to wake the little dove."

"Humph!" chuckled Hartlieth, though making the examination not uninterestedly; "looks like a chunk of dough."

"He's the image of his father!" exclaimed Polly. "I can see the major all over him."

This seemed so preposterous to the gigantic Hartlieth that he went off into a roar of individual mirth that awoke the baby forthwith, and there was a fresh wail, much to the concern of both women.

"Come back to me as soon as you get him to sleep again, Sally," Mrs. Delamour called out, as the dark young mother was beating her retreat. "I shall want you to help me with my disguise."

This remark restored Mr. Hartlieth to seriousness, making him very thoughtful.

"I might get along without you, Pol," he observed, consulting his watch.

"Nonsense!" observed Mrs. Delamour, already busying herself at a magnificent dressing-case at one end of the room, in full view of the spying detective; "you could do nothing without me, Herbert. Besides, I would not miss the excitement of sharing to-night's peril with you for anything. Is that the plan you secured from the parlor-maid?"

"Yes," he had taken it out of his pocket, and was slowly examining it—Castlemaine's ground-floor sketch in diagram. "And there shouldn't be any risk to speak of. Easy as rolling off a log."

"What time is it now?" She had taken off her wrapper, and continued to talk without turning away from her dressing-case mirror.

"Past eleven," he replied. "We mustn't think of making the attempt earlier than one, if so soon."

"No, and two or three were yet safer. However, we might as well be in readiness first as last. I laid your disguise out for you in your old room yonder."

"All right, then." And, stretching his vast frame back in his chair, Mr. Hartlieth rose, and slowly entered the room indicated, without troubling himself to close the door behind him.

"All the disguise in the world wouldn't cover away your size," she laughed after him. "What in the world do you want to be so big for?"

He was heard to grumble out some jesting response, and then Sally reappearing, after putting her baby to sleep, Mrs. Delamour sat down before the mirror, shook loose her wonderful hair, and the chief work of her own toilette began.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BETRAYED.

AND that wonderful hair!

There was no other and more pronounced revelation of the toilette, such as might have caused the secretly observant detective to avert his reverent eyes, but that marvelous chevelure—the arrangement, combing and brushing out of that grand head of hair, and the ingenious tucking and plaiting and braiding of it away, chiefly on top of the wearer's head, doubtless that the donning of a masculine hat might be ultimately effected without a hirsute give-away as to the masquerader's true sex—was a revelation in itself.

It might be a cheat with regard to its rich, burnished gold yellow hue, as the detective had formerly surmised—and as yet he was uncertain whether the associative blonde brilliancy

of complexion was likewise a deception, due to cunning art—but it was a glorious cheat, for all that.

Rich, exuberant, glossy, sparkling, royally extravagant, it writhed into gleaming serpentine twists that seemed all but alive under the action of the comb, tumbled in glistening rippling cataracts down over its owner's splendid shoulders and far down her shapely back, or was coiled up and away, twist by twist, braid by braid, in glossy, reposeful masses—a miracle of capillary beauty—such a womanly coronal as an empress might have greedily craved at the cost of many a bursting purse and many an heirloom gem!

But for the time being, in spite of this novel exhibition unveiled to his feasting eyes, Castlemaine was full of doubt, and he was more steadily and critically observant of the duskily handsome tire-woman than the gorgeously fair beauty under her ministering hands.

Yes, it was Mrs. Musgrave's erstwhile maid, sure enough. He had caught one previous glimpse of her at the Newport villa, when briefly there to help out his duller brother detective in the famous diamond case, just before the girl had disappeared so mysteriously on the heels of the vanished jewels, and with them presumably in her possession. There could be no doubt of that. Such a Gypsy face and figure were not to be forgotten. And her present mistress and she were evidently sisters, from what had just been revealed to him in the former's unrestrained talk with Hartlieth, her husband—another of the thronging disclosures of this eventful night. But why was not Justine—blonde, faithful little Justine, to whose devotion he owed the security of his present situation—to perform that duty with the wonderful golden hair? And what was it about the absent Justine herself—the something inexplicable that had struck him vaguely from the very first, and which now haunted him yet more intensely, yet still vaguely and tantalizing with this young Gypsy widow of the murdered blackmailer directly under his critical gaze? Ah, yes; Justine was doubtless now watching over the sleeping babe in the dining-room or kitchen. This would, at least, partly explain matters.

While he was still speculating and cogitating, Mrs. Delamour, her hair edifice by this time toweringly complete, sprung up from her seat before the mirror, with much energy and satisfaction.

"Now come to my room with me, Sally!" she said, bustling off to her chamber—across the narrow communicating passage from Castlemaine's hiding-place, it will be remembered—followed by the younger woman, and calling out to Hartlieth as she disappeared: "Come right into the drawing-room now, and wait for me, Herbert; that is, if you are anything like ready, and it will convenience you."

"Ready, indeed?" was his laughing response from the room in which he had accommodated himself—directly off the drawing-room to the right, and cut off from the end of the main private hall. "As if I required the time that it will doubtless take you to transform yourself!"

And then he came leisurely into view, but so transformed himself that, but for his deliberate gait and vast muscular proportions, which of course no cleverness of disguise could change or modify, Castlemaine would have found some difficulty in penetrating his identity.

Bewigged and false-whiskered, in a rough but fairly well-fitting laborer's dress of coarse frieze, such as a prosperous Scotch or Irish workingman might have assumed for some special occasion other than church-going or festive, he completed his counterfeit presentation by covering his head with a huge black felt slouch hat on coming into view, and then after a lazily-approving glance into the mirror, and again seated himself at the table, where he helped himself liberally to the wine, and thoughtfully lighted a fresh cigar.

"Not even the witching hour of twelve yet," he called out to his wife, after glancing at his watch. "Take your time, Polly."

"That is just what I am doing, my dear?" came back her melodious voice in response; after which she could be indistinctly heard talking with her companion.

Hartlieth, left to himself, once more produced his diagram of the Blanton house, and began to study it intently, with knitted brows.

The stock of a short heavy club or billy peeped out of one of his pockets, as he sat there thus absorbed under the strong light, as complete a picture of herculean strength and possible dangerousness in temporary repose as could well be conceived.

Castlemaine would now willingly enough, and even more than willingly, have beaten a retreat, in order to be beforehand with the adventurous pair in their night's undertaking, but, unfortunately, this was not now possible with any degree of safety.

For some reason Sally, before following her sister out of the parlor, had partly opened the door leading from it out into the private hall, and, the little window by which he had gained his hiding-place being but a step or two distant, it would have been impossible, even with ten

times his expert, cat-like stealthiness of movement, to make his escape by the same means without detection, and there was none other available.

He descended from his perch on the packing-box, and looked around him not a little desperately.

The door facing Polly's bedroom, across the little interior passage, was not to be thought of. Detection would mean defeat, the surrender of pretty much all that he had mastered of the heretofore murder-and-diamond mystery, perhaps his immediate assassination, no less—for that both Hartlieth and his female confederate would hesitate at no crime on occasion he was quite certain—so that a possible fight for his liberty, unless fairly forced upon him, was equally out of the question.

And yet here was the villainous new plot to oust that noble girl, Nelly Blanton out of her heirship perhaps on the very threshold of accomplishment, perhaps her very life in peril, and he helpless, self-imprisoned, unable to interpose a hand or even warn! for notwithstanding his assurance of Tom Rashton's pluck and athletic prowess he could not but set the hot-headed young man's guardian as little more than a cipher as against the cunning and desperateness of this unprincipled pair of worthies who were like enough veterans in the species of criminal enterprise that was now under way.

What should he do?

Suddenly his face lighted up a little as he noticed the opposite little window that opened out back into the dining-room.

"Ah, yes; and was not Justine, his proved good friend, somewhere back there probably in the kitchen just beyond, with the Rorston baby? It was evidently his only chance to effect his escape.

But just as he was making a first step toward the little back window, a series of rustling movements without, indicating that Mrs. Delamour and her sister were returning to the dining-room, called him back to his post of observation.

Unfortunate, if not fatal, delay! though, of course, Castlemaine could know nor guess nothing of its significance.

The Delamour had just re-entered the parlor, in her complete masculine disguise—that of a coarse-dressed, rather tough-looking youth—and Hartlieth was laughing his approval, while Sally was standing undemonstratively by.

Suddenly the latter wheeled, and, pointing directly toward the detective's peep-hole, called out in a clear, spiteful voice:

"There is a spy in there! He must have been there all the evening. I know it!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### "OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH."

So complete and unexpected was this sudden betrayal that the detective, in starting back, overturned the box on which he had been standing, and fell his length upon the floor.

True, he was up in an instant, revolver in hand, and with a desperate spring toward the little window opening into the dining-room, but it was too late.

Hartlieth had sprung from his hiding-place with a hoarse, infuriated cry, and the Delamour herself was confronting the entrapped man at the little window, her cocked revolver aimed at his breast, her eyes blazing with resentment.

Then Castlemaine was caught up in the giant's tremendous clutch from behind, his weapon dashed from his hand, a heavy blow descended upon his crown, and for a minute or two he was as dazed and confused as he was absolutely helpless.

Then Hartlieth dragged him into the parlor, still clutching at him with a tigerish animosity that one could scarcely have credited to one of his ordinarily sluggish, easy-going manner, which was, however, only too evidently but a mere mask for the passions and temper of an inborn ruffian.

"It's Mr. Blanton's new footman!" cried the disguised Delamour, fairly gnashing her teeth. "How could he have found his way in there?"

"The Lord only knows!" Gypsy Sally took it upon herself to reply, with a peculiarly mischievous laugh; "but Justine might know something about it, you know. Shall I run for her? Perhaps she has fallen asleep over baby."

Both the others gave her a staring look, as if not understanding her, after which Hartlieth gazed yet closer and more inquisitively into the face of his half-throttled victim.

"Blanton's new footman be hanged!" he roared. "Good Lord! why did we never suspect this before? It's Guy Castlemaine, the detective!" And then he all but whitened with rage as he renewed his clutch on the unfortunate detective's throat, and pounded his head on the floor with a violence that would doubtless have broken it but for the intervention of the heavy Wilton carpet.

"The detective?" half-shrieked the Delamour.

Then the significance to them of all that Castlemaine must have witnessed and overheard—

together with his object in surreptitiously entering Mr. Blanton's service—seemed to rush upon them bewilderingly, and they were all but frantic with rage, apprehension and resentment.

An exception must be noted, though, in the case of Gypsy Sally, who merely stood, with her arms akimbo, coolly looking down upon the evidently doomed victim, a hard light in her eyes, a cruel smile wreathing her comely lips.

"But in what way shall you kill him?" she suddenly asked, with a rather unconcerned air. "He might be poisoned, just as we used to do the British farmers' hogs in England. You remember the Romany camp and the dear old wandering, moonshine life, Polly, before our dad took to inn-keeping at Hartlieth, and gave us our first real launch among the quality?"

"Shut up!" was the Delamour's coarse rejoinder. "I only remember that we've got this detective-dog in our power and—hurry up and decide something, Herbert! What is the matter with you now?"

He had mastered the fierce savagery of his passion by this time, and was comparatively calm, though with a suggestive deadliness in the drawn, close-lipped pallor of his large, comely, heavy-jawed face that was perhaps even more terrible as to its outcome.

But at this juncture Castlemaine took advantage of momentary relaxation of the giant clutch upon him to sit up and look about him.

It was quite obvious that a timely exhibition of 'cheek'—a quality that he had never lacked—could not make his fate any more desperate than it was, while there was just the possibility of it helping him out.

"I'll tell you what I'll do with you," he said, looking his captor steadily in the face, with a collected smile. "Send the woman away, and, giving you the extra size and weight, I'll fight you fairly, rough and tumble, nary a complaint, and win or lose, for the hundred dollars, which I happen to have about me, against an even ten of your own."

Instead of an answer being vouchsafed to this decidedly cool proposition, there was merely an added remorselessness of the compressed, iron-like lips of the great face that was gazing down, phlegmatic in its mercilessness, upon him.

Then, with a sudden diabolism as swift as thought, the colossus snatched out a revolver, cocked it, and clapped the muzzle hard against the detective's ear.

A sudden cold-blooded protest on the part of the mistress of the apartments probably alone prevented the murder intended.

"Here, none of that, Herbert!" she cried, fearlessly knocking aside the weapon. "What! you would ruin my best carpet—a true Axminster, at three dollars a yard—with this scoundrel's blood and brains, would you? Not if I know it!"

The relict of the murdered Major Rorston laughed amusedly.

"Get a sheet, or—or something, then!" growled Hartlieth, hoarse with half-suppressed fury. "Curse it all!" with a horrible oath; "d'ye think I'm going to let the vermin live, perhaps to hang or State Prison the lot of us?"

"No, no! but think of something else—some other way. We've the whole night to do him quietly in, and—" She interrupted herself, smiting her brow exasperatedly.

"Think of some other way yourself, then—" he had again hurled the detective back, resuming his throttling clutch—"or by Heaven! I won't answer for myself."

"I have it!" suddenly half-screamed swarthy Sally, with her dreadful merriment. "The elevator-shaft! the elevator-shaft! Accidental death—so easy to have fallen down there in the night! Aha!" And she even clapped her hands.

"Good God!" Castlemaine managed to groan out, though with unmitigated loathing and disgust, rather than terror, hopelessness or any other sensation; "is that creature really a woman, or the foul fiend himself in petticoats?"

"Good idea, Sally!" chuckled Hartlieth. "Lead the way out, you two."

Then the luckless detective felt himself borne up and away in that tremendous grasp, as if he had been the merest image of a man molded out of cork.

The dimmest of lights was burning in the main or general hall-passage, as he was hurried along in the wake of the two women.

Sally pulled back the shaft trellis gate, and the great square abyss-like opening yawned out and down before the group in unrelied blackness—a gulf of doom, the jaws of death its gaping mouth.

"No more delay!" the detective heard the Delamour say, in a harsh, constrained voice, like one in a nightmare dream.

Then he was lifted high up, and hurled, down, down, down!

Even in the horror of that swift plunge, and anticipative solely of the next instant that was to have dashed to death at the bottom of the shaft, Castlemaine's faculties of thought and perception were strangely, all but preternaturally alive, alert and conscious.

He even heard or *felt* his murderous enemies start back, with a breathless exclamation—the gasping reaction over the awfulness of the

deed achieved, and could speculate on their probable first panic-stricken flight back to the drawing-room, there to huddle for mutual reassurance before venturing down below by the stairways, to look upon the hideous accomplishment of their work.

And down, down, still down, even while he thought and fancied and perhaps prayed!

Then a sensation of sudden light enveloping him out of the rushing darkness; then a blow, as of his body striking something at the smooth side of the shaft, and thus breaking in some degree the velocity of his plunge; then the stunning shock of his final collision—but against something soft and yielding, in lieu of hard stone or timber—a rebound—and he was out of the shaft at the cellar opening, apparently shaken to his last bone and immovable fiber, in a quivering, huddled heap, but neither dead, nor even hopelessly crushed, so far as he could judge, with his presence of mind swiftly reasserting its courageous, indomitable sway.

Light—the light of which he had been dimly conscious of rushing into—was issuing from a single gas-burner.

What had happened? To what had he owed his preservation?

Gathering himself together, with a pang in every muscle and bone, he crawled to the edge of the shallow shaft-pit, out of which he had rebounded, and glanced shudderingly down.

That one look was a sufficient explanation of his escape from the jaws of death.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A SUCCESSFUL RUSE.

THERE lay a crushed, mangled and motionless human form—the form of the man who had, either purposely or by accident, intervened between the falling detective and his waiting death, by himself receiving the impact of his down-shooting body.

The gaslight fell fairly enough into the shallow pit to reveal all—the bruised, broken figure, the half-upturned face, bruised and blackened out of nearly all semblance to humanity.

Then the clothing and general aspect of the poor wretch aroused the detective's recognition through his recollections.

It was the nameless outcast of the previous evening, whom he had encouraged and assisted—past his earthly trials now, and in all probability nameless, at least in this world, forevermore.

Castlemaine had been slowly recuperating from the shock with every breath he drew.

Now a sudden thought occurred to him, a ruse by which he might bring retribution upon those enemies of his, who had been so remorseless, so dead to every sentiment of humanity, and in the near future.

To plan was to act with him. He looked up the shaft and listened intently.

Not a sound from above.

They had probably retreated to the furnished apartments, to recover their own shaken nerves, before venturing upon an investigation below.

He jumped, or rather, painfully let himself down into the pit, which was not more than two feet deep, and set about the awful task of exchanging outer garments with the crushed and battered nameless one.

As he had casually noticed on their first chance acquaintance, they were about the one size and figure; and, as has been mentioned, the dead man's face was absolutely past recognition.

It was a repulsive task, but at last it was finished.

Castlemaine was attired in what had been the poor unknown's seedy, half-ragged suit, while his own footman's dark-blue livery was, after a fashion, fitted upon the dead man. Not even the exchange of hats was forgotten.

Still suffering greatly from his shaking-up, Castlemaine had just time to crawl up out of the hole, when he heard steps and voices far up the stairway.

His would-be murderers were at last venturing down to contemplate their fell criminal deed.

He crept into the compartment, or bin, in which the outcast had made his wretched bed, and pulling the door to with the exception of a peep-crack, watched and waited.

The steps came lower down, Hartlieth's heavy and unfaltering tread sounding distinctly in the advance, the lighter steps of the women following more hesitatingly. And then his voice was first heard, saying:

"Hallo, there's a light down here! I suppose the janitor is in the habit of leaving one burning. So much the better for us. Put out that candle and set it to one side, Polly; we sha'n't require it. Humpf! and here we are at last."

Then the detective saw them gather about the pit and look down, silently at first, and perhaps duly impressed with the general horror of the spectacle before them.

Again, with the exception of the brunette ex-lady's maid, however, who was the first to break the silence with a giggling laugh, and a heartless—rather satanic—jest on their detective foe being happily done for and past the requirements of future tricks and disguises.

Castlemaine's blood quickened angrily in his veins, and his hand clutched convulsively.

If he could have twisted that demoniac Gypsy's neck then and there, he would have done it with no more compunction than if it had been a chicken.

But the Hartlieth couple, howsoever rejoiced they might be with the result on general principles, were in little sympathy with their companion's levity, and the detective could see that the disguised adventuress kept her face averted from the tragic sight, and that it was very pale.

Hartlieth, on his part, however, had recovered much of his wonted deliberateness and phlegmatism.

"Stand back out of the light, you two," he said at last. "What was it the rascal offered to fight me for with his unconscionable cheek—a cool hundred? A pity it should go to waste now, and on the body of one who was a brave man at that."

In spite of his continued pain, the detective could not help smiling maliciously, as he saw him step down into the pit to search the body.

"Blast the cad! it was a mere bluff, after all," Hartlieth's voice presently called out, angrily and disappointedly. "Not a penny or anything else in his pockets, or I am a Dutchman!"

Whereat there was yet another smile from the concealed detective, who had taken good care to secure his cash before making the transfer of clothing, including a small revolver, which he had always carried in one of his breast pockets, though with little notion of ever being required to use it, though now or presently it might not come amiss, considering that he had lost his more serviceable weapon when first overpowered.

"Come away!" cried out the Delamour, in a strangely altered voice, as Hartlieth stepped up, grumbly, out of the pit. "I'm sick of this thing, and the coroner will most likely attend to the rest."

"I'm with you," assented Hartlieth. "Come along, then. It was a swift, bold deed, at all events. Sally, you're to return to the apartments alone, while Polly and I cut our sticks direct from here. That is, if you're not afraid."

"Afraid!" the Gypsy was heard to reply, with that hard laugh of hers, which was at once so hateful and so vaguely familiar-like to the listening detective. "Yes, that is so like me, isn't it, brother Herbert? Besides," the laugh again, but with the inner sense of intense amusement that had puzzled him in a different way, since there was no knowing wherein the amusement lay, "haven't I baby and Justine to keep me company?"

Castlemaine made his way out of his hiding-place, as he heard them ascend, and looked at his watch.

For a wonder, considering the shock of the fall, it was going, and marked five minutes past one.

Then he listened until he heard the street entrance, indicating that the Hartlieth couple were off upon their undertaking; after which he started to track them with a fierce, vengeful exultance, but came to a pause in sudden consternation.

What was it, paralysis, stupefaction, palsy, or what?

He could scarcely move, save to tremble violently with the exertion to do so, his feet remaining numb and heavy, as if rooted to the pavement, while a cold sweat was starting out upon his forehead.

The fact was that Castlemaine had been much more seriously shocked by his tumble than he had at first supposed.

Shaking off his present trembling condition finally, however, by a sheer exertion of his will power, he at last got on the move, though in a comparatively hesitant and tardy manner, that was but a pitiful travesty upon his accustomed energetic alertness and activity.

"However, he might still be in time, if not to overtake, to warn, to save."

The two blocks to be traversed between the Perthshire and the Blanton residence, or between the Seventh and the Fifth avenues, were the extra-long transverse ones with which every New Yorker is so familiar.

After accomplishing less than half the distance amid the deep midnight-silence of the lonely hour, and without having encountered a living soul, Castlemaine stopped half-despairingly to look at his watch.

It indicated that ten minutes had been consumed in traversing less than an eighth of a mile.

However, he might still be in time, and he pushed on, laboriously, painfully, every step costing him a pang.

If he could only have met a policeman! But he hearkened in vain for the echo of one's footsteps, the tap of the official locust.

At last, however, at the turn of the last corner, with the Blanton grounds and mansion in sight under the starlight, his maddening physical disability seemed suddenly to fall away from him like a shackling spell, though, on his essaying a shout of warning, he found that he could not speak above a whisper.

Still, his strength, his energy, and buoyancy were returned to him.

He bounded forward, was through the gate, into the grounds, and leaping onward toward the house.

A muffled shot from near at hand, a cursing voice, and then the scuffling of feet amid the shrubbery to his right!

## CHAPTER XXII.

### TOO LATE.

THEN there was the sound of a falling body, and, turning off in the direction of the sound, the detective suddenly came in collision with the disguised Delamour, in breathless flight, pistol in hand.

She avoided him, and he darted after her, northward, and straight across the grounds in the direction of those adjoining.

Reaching a tall dividing hedge, which she could not overleap, the fugitive snapped her revolver full in his face.

Castlemaine had neglected to draw his own revolver, being desirous to capture rather than kill, in this woman's case at least.

Knocking the weapon out of her hand, he seized her in his still powerful grasp.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed, in the hoarse whisper that was yet all that was left of his voice; "you are mine—my man!"

But the Delamour was herself powerfully muscular, and but little given to womanish fears.

"Not yet!" she gasped, in reply, struggling furiously. "Outcast! tramp!" there was enough starlight even among the surrounding shrubbery for her to note his seedy and trampish externals, incidental to his changed garments, which he himself had forgotten until her words reminded him of it; "this for your intermeddling pains!"

There was a flash, and then a dagger in her hand was menacing him.

This also was eluded, however, and then, with a swift wrestling trick he hurled her to the ground, but going down with her, so closely and strongly did she maintain her clutch, though the knife went flying out of her hand with the shock of her fall.

But the Delamour now struggled like a maniac, as it became evident that she was being overmastered, for her hat had rolled off, and her wonderful woman's hair was tumbling about her shoulders and out over the trampled turf in glittering masses.

"Ha!" exclaimed the detective, bearing down upon her with all his force, and willing enough to keep up his own new character; a woman, eh? Come, then, hell-cat, a tress of your fair locks for true love!"

And before she could prevent it, or perhaps even guess his intention, he had snatched up the fallen poniard, grasped her by the head, and severed an immense mass of her hair, if not the entire lower mass of it, within a few hand-breadths of the scalp.

The Delamour, if frenzied before, was now diabolical in her rage, and she scratched, bit, clawed and tore, like a she-fiend out of the nethermost pit.

Then there was a hoarse, but cautious, shout or half-shout from near at hand, accompanied by heavy, crashing steps through the shrubbery.

"Where are you, Poll?" called out Hartlieth's voice, still in guarded tones. "The job's good, and I have the prize. Where are you?"

"Here, here!" was the gasping, half-choked response. "Quick! quick! A trampish devil has me fast and—oh, my hair, my hair!"

Castlemaine raised up his captive, to dash her to the ground again harder than before, and then, clutching at the severed hair, sprung to his feet to confront the rescuer.

But at the same instant he was in Hartlieth's tremendous grasp, whirled up high in the air, and hurled out and away clear across the top of the dividing hedge, as if shot out of a gun.

He fell so hard on the opposite side as to be incapable of motion for several seconds.

"Follow him—kill him!" he heard the Delamour exclaim, doubtless with the gnashing of teeth. "A thousand curses on the villain! he has carried off my hair."

"He might have had your head with it," Hartlieth was heard to impatiently growl in reply. "Come along!" with an oath. "In another minute the whole street will be alarmed."

"But my hair, my hair!"

Then there was the sound of their retreat, very much as if Hartlieth was hurrying his companion away with him by force of arms.

But, oddly enough, there was no general alarm as yet—the residences in this aristocratic section of Harlem being in many instances widely separated, with intervening grounds—though at this juncture an upper window was cautiously raised directly over a space of gravelled walk near which the detective had measured his length after his compulsory flight over the hedge.

"What is the matter?" called out a timid, and yet curious, feminine voice. "Any one down there?"

Mrs. Musgrave's own voice! and by this time Castlemaine was slowly getting upon his feet,

and recovering from his second violent shaking-up of that eventful night.

An idea suddenly occurred to him, which he acted upon at once.

If he could only make the little widow his friend in his new character!

"Don't be alarmed, ma'm," he called gently up to her, in response. "There was disturbance, but it was in the adjoining grounds, not here. I ran to the rescue of some one who was being attacked there—alas! the poor fellow may have been killed—and was myself set upon by ruffians, perhaps burglars, and hurled clean over your hedge. Oh, I have been so rattled up, ma'm!"

"Run for a policeman!" advised the widow, from her window nook, now more curious than frightened.

"Can't ma'm. Feel as if every bone in me was rattled out of place." He staggered back, looking up at her wistfully, there now being some moonlight, which fell full upon his upturned face. "Couldn't you send one of your men-servants?"

"My men-servants are all women—I mean I have no man-servant. Oh, dear! I fear you are a tramp."

"Madam, you wrong me. I am unfortunate, it is true, but I am honest and chivalric, and my being here in this strange position is owing to my self-sacrificing nature. Oh, if I only had a cup of coffee, a crust of bread, anything that would give me a little strength."

Here there was heard a faint pounding noise, together with voices, from the direction of the Blanton house, which was shut from view by intervening shrubbery and trees.

Castlemaine had been listening attentively, and presently recognized Tom Rashton's voice, probably in a colloquy with some of the inmates of the Blanton establishment, to whom he was communicating the alarm as to the burglarious attempt that had been made upon it.

This relieved his mind as to Rashton having come to any serious injury, and he continued to raise his melancholy, appealing face to the brightly curious eyes bent down upon him from the window above.

As has been intimated, our detective's countenance was an eminently handsome and attractive one; and perhaps the widow had discovered the fact, in spite of his decidedly trampish externals in other respects.

Moreover, Mrs. Musgrave was a very independent and somewhat eccentric little lady, the romance in whose kindly, pleasure-loving temperament had by no means become extinguished by her dozen years of abundant means and untrammeled widowhood.

It should also be mentioned that Castlemaine before quitting the cellar-basement of the Perthshire, had found means to assist the refreshment of his jarred faculties by a vigorous rubbing up of his head and face with a plentiful application of cold water, by which the last vestiges of his make-up as Mr. Blanton's footman had been removed.

In other words, barring his trampish overwear, he was now subjected to the down-looking widow's curious eyes, there in the mellow and always picturesque moonlight, in all such suave and original comeliness as had been always his own.

"But this is very dreadful!" replied Mrs. Musgrave, doubtfully. "Bless me! a burglary! Why, poor Nelly—that is Miss Blanton—she is my niece—may have been killed, or at least frightened to death!"

"Oh, I trust not, ma'm! Is the lady you speak of an inmate of the big old house over yonder, there?"

"Yes, yes!" hurriedly. "You poor man! Wait; I shall call my maid—I hear her stirring now. But first I will throw you down some small change, so that you can procure something to eat."

"At this hour of the night, ma'm?"

"True, true."

"Besides, I have never accepted alms in money. Oh, I would sooner starve!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A CHARMING WIDOW.

"Bless me! what shall I do? Hark to those voices over there! Poor Nelly may surely have been killed, or Mr. Blanton, or all of them! Here," turning partly back into the room, which had not been lighted, and calling, "Hilda, Hilda!"

"Wait, ma'm!" cried the detective, and she once more thrust out her pretty head in the moonlight. It was pretty, in spite of the slightly tumbled and other indications of her having been unexpectedly aroused from her night's rest, and a hastily assumed but very becoming scarlet silk wrap-dressing gown, drawn snugly about her ample shoulders and bust, was not a bad set-off for her plump brunette type of attractiveness. "I will run over there and find out what I can, and then come back to you with my report."

"Ah! but you are still weak and hungry, you say."

"No matter, ma'm. I'll do it, even at the risk of bringing down suspicion on myself."

And he bounded away, leaping the hedge.

A policeman, awakened or attracted at last

by the small hubbub, was just entering the Blanton grounds as the detective gained the main house-path, and, fortunately, he was a patrolman with whom Castlemaine was well acquainted.

The latter tendered a few words explanatory of his presence there, besides cautioning the other to reticence with regard to his identity, and then they hurried up to the house together; the detective presently hanging back, so as to be within earshot, while his companion should make the inquiries on his own account.

Mr. Blanton, in high dudgeon and no little excitement, was by this time on the front porch conversing with Tom Rashton, who appeared to have received a broken head, but nothing worse, and the entire household was astir, with the interior rapidly lighting up.

"A pretty, a most efficient police force we have for our protection here in New York!" exclaimed the old gentleman, with indignant irony. He was one of this chronic and crusty old grumbler against any and every public service, whether with occasion for it or not, and the tardy appearance of the patrolman at last had much the effect upon his ill-humor that a red flag is supposed to exert upon the proverbial bovine frenzy. "Oh, yes, 'one of the finest,' of course? Ha! Good God! and it is to support this sort of service in luxury, indolence and new uniforms that we miserable property-owners are taxed out of our incomes—boots, brains and breeches! Haw!" And he wound up a good deal more of the same sort with a species of hysterical snort.

"What is the matter, sir?" demanded the patrolman, imperturbably. "I am here for the purpose of finding out; if you don't choose to tell me, pray say so. But all your abuse is wasted on me, like so much water on a duck's back."

"Ah, indeed; and you'd go away, I suppose, and leave us to be murdered in our beds next time; and when, but for this heroic young gentleman, we might be cold in death already. Tom, you rascal, I've been severe on you of late; but you may call around to-morrow and take dinner with Nelly and me. Six, sharp. Where is Henry, that smug-faced, lazy dog of a manservant of mine? He hasn't shown up so much as one of his spit-curls since this hullabaloo began. Humph! ah! Yes; it is this that we are taxed out of our very eyes for—to be burglarized with impunity—to be house-cracked out of our homes and beds, and never a policeman within gunshot till our coffers are plundered, our purses cut, our hard-earned treasures feloniously despoiled. 'The finest!' Good Lord!" And so on.

The officer finally managed to extract the information, however, chiefly from Rashton's contribution to the story that the house had undoubtedly been broken into, though it could not yet be ascertained that any valuables had been carried off, and that he, the young man, while chancing along the street, had pursued one of the thieves through the shrubbery, only to be knocked temporarily senseless by a blow with a pistol-butt in the encounter that had followed, but not before he had fired a shot at the rascal, probably without effect.

Then Miss Blanton, very pale but composed, and by this time fully dressed, came out of the house to say that the housebreaker had doubtless entered her apartment before making his escape, and that not anything of great importance was missing.

"Not anything of great importance!" testily repeated Mr. Blanton, turning upon her. "But what did you lose, or was anything carried off?"

"Yes," she replied, with a pale, startled look for Tom; "a small reticule, containing some old letters. That is all, I think."

"Good!" cried the old gentleman, already with partly-restored good-humor. "Only some old letters! Well, we're lucky to have escaped so easily, and no thanks to the 'finest police force in the world,' into the bargain."

At this juncture, there being nothing more to learn, the detective, who had kept himself out of sight, slipped away, and hurriedly retraced his steps in the direction of Mrs. Musgrave's residence.

Here he was so fortunate as to find the widow down-stairs, along with her maid and cook, and evidently awaiting his report with greatly-augmented curiosity.

"You may come in, sir, and my servants will get you something to eat," said she, with cold condescension, as she appeared at her front door upon hearing his entrance at the garden-gate. "We are all armed to the teeth here, for all that we are only women, please understand, 'with a double-barreled critical look, as you might say, when her visitor was fairly in the glare of the hall-lamp—one for his seedy and not altogether reassuring figure, the other for his modest comeliness of face and air. 'But you can come in—yes, you can come in. Oh, dear, and you do look half-famished, and ill besides!'"

Indeed, Castlemaine, still suffering from his harsh tumble, was feeling quite as ill as he looked, and chilled into the bargain, though by no means really starving.

"Perhaps I had better not, ma'm," he re-

plied, respectfully lowering his eyes, after a modest but highly complimentary admiring stare, and he stepped back diffidently.

"Yes, yes!" with growing interest; "I insist on it now. Besides," frankly, "perhaps you are not so disrespectful as you look."

"Oh, ma'm, I hope not," still hesitating.

"Then you heard my warning about our being armed. What was the matter over there at Mr. Blanton's?"

"Only a small excitement, ma'm, but no great harm done, I hope."

"Well, come in. How long do you fancy I am going to stand shivering here at the open door. Hilda! Bridget!" a little angrily for her servants, who were huddling curiously at her elbow, and, if eying the strange guest with no great favor, betraying but few indications of the bristling personal armament which their mistress had so diplomatically vaunted; "what are you coddling and trembling here for, like a shorn lamb in a briar-bush? Is the coffee on to boil, and are the cold dishes set out?"

"Yes, ma'm," the cook replied.

"Begone then for the present, both of you. And where is faithful, grim old Topsy, our watch-dog?"

"Here, ma'm!" this time from the maid.

And, as both women disappeared, 'faithful, grim old Topsy'—which proved to be a superannuated little old female pug dog, of about three pounds weight, scant—came scuffling timidly into view, with a look of decided apprehension at the detective.

The latter hesitated no longer, and was speedily installed over a cold but appetizing set-out in the widow's elegant little dining-room.

Mrs. Musgrave sat watching her strange guest for some time with growing satisfaction.

Not only was she fond of seeing persons eating heartily on general and sympathetic principles, being highly appreciative of gustatory pleasures herself, as her comfortably plump person amply testified, but she quickly perceived that her guest's table manners were altogether unexceptionable, and even marked by a refinement and delicacy in most striking contrast with his meanness of garb.

"Dear me, a real gentleman, as I live!" was the little widow's mental comment. "Who'd have thought it, even with his handsome face and melancholy air? Perhaps an educated young man in distressed circumstances, or even a nobleman in disguise." And she indulgently thought of a second cousin and former admirer of her own, who had squandered a fortune and taken up with horse-car conductoring before finally drinking himself to death in sheer despair with the harsh world's usage.

"You'll have coffee in another minute, sir," she said aloud, after a slight pause. "Or would you prefer a glass of wine," with a sharp, tentative look.

"No, ma'm, thank you," modestly replied the detective, altogether too shrewd to be caught in the trap. "I would prefer the coffee."

This was accordingly brought, and then, when once more alone with her guest, Mrs. Musgrave said:

"Now, young man, you can tell me what was the matter over at the Blantons'—just little by little while you finish eating, you know."

Castlemaine accordingly complied, with the utmost fidelity, just as he had gathered the facts from what he had overheard as gathered by the policeman.

She frowned and seemed both troubled and mystified on learning of the theft of certain of Miss Blanton's letters as the sole discoverable loss by the housebreaking.

"This is very remarkable!" she said, half to herself. "Nelly had some trouble of this kind before. What can it mean? And why on earth doesn't she burn the letters?"

She shook her head, and then again turned interestedly to her guest, who had by this time finished his repast.

"How odd all this is!" she observed, with her pleasant smile; "you being here, my never having seen you before, and all the rest of it."

"Life is crowded with strange surprises, ma'm," replied the detective, a little sententiously. "We are up or we are down at the turn of Fortune's wheel." He sighed.

"Suppose you tell me something of yourself," suggested his hostess. "I sha'n't think of going to bed again now, and it might be interesting."

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### A NEW OUTLOOK.

"SUCH as my story may be worth, madam," replied the detective, with modest dignity, "you are welcome to. How kind you have been to me! I were worse than ungrateful to deny you the story of my poor life, and you will perhaps find it not devoid of sympathetic interest. God bless you for your kindness and confidence, ma'm!"

"Don't say anything more about that, young man!" said Mrs. Musgrave, a little impatiently. "Let us make a beginning now. My name is Janet Musgrave. What is yours?"

"Mainecastle, ma'm, at your good service."

"Why, come, now, that is quite an impres-

sive name. What has been your vocation sir?"

"Latterly, but a servant, ma'm," with half-suppressed scorn. "However, I do not curse the ill-fortune that brought me down to a menial employment, and would willingly fill another such place as my last one, if only I had the chance."

He then told her his story—or, at all events, such a story as did not fail to interest her to the last degree.

"Ah, indeed, and what a very wonderful and adventurous life you have had, Mr. Mainecastle," observed Mrs. Musgrave at last.

"Some might esteem it such, madam," replied the seedy man of romance, composedly.

"Well, I should say so. And so you were something of a detective before you took it into your head to go out to service?"

"A little something in that line, ma'm."

"I have often thought I would like to be a detective."

"There are ladies in the profession, ma'm; and successful ones at that."

"La, now, I suppose so!" and then the pretty widow, who had made herself a sandwich, munched it reflectively between her words. "Which do you prefer now, the detective profession, or being out to service?"

"The latter, ma'm, if I should fortunately secure a place with so kind a mistress as you would be."

"Don't be so sure of that. My friends call me both whimsical and—eccentric."

"One's friends, ma'm, are oftentimes more envious than sincere."

"I am so thirsty that I am going to treat myself to a glass of wine, Mr. Mainecastle; and I shall be glad to have you join me. Yonder," with a gesture toward the handsome buffet near at hand, "is the claret. I seldom use anything stronger."

"Mr. Mainecastle" took the hint, and in an instant had set out the decanter and glasses with a quick and unobtrusive expertness that would have done credit to any old-time family butler in France or England.

Indeed, he soon succeeded in making himself so generally serviceable and modestly agreeable that his fair hostess and he were soon quite good friends, or as much as was consistent with their relative positions in the social scale.

"But you have forgot to tell, Mr. Mainecastle," observed the widow at length, while sipping her wine, "where you were last employed."

"If it isn't absolutely necessary, ma'm," was the deeply respectful reply, "I should prefer not to. There are certain painful secrets in one's past history, ma'm, which, while reflecting no discredit upon a man's honesty or integrity of character—" Apparently too greatly moved to proceed, he broke off with a little sigh, a last troubled look in his eyes before lowering them, and a slight bow, with his hand on his heart.

"Oh, don't think of it, then," Mrs. Musgrave hastened to say, while thinking to herself, 'Dear me, what a very remarkable and sensitive young man, to have been only a detective and a serving-man.' "But I suppose you could furnish the requisite recommendation, should another place be offered you?"

"The very best and unexceptionable ones, ma'm," promptly.

Here Mrs. Musgrave uttered a little exclamation with her sympathies otherwise enlisted for the moment.

"Topsy", who had been reposing peacefully in her lap when not being fed with multifarious tid-bits from the table at frequent intervals, moved uneasily in her slumbers and even began to whine.

"That dog's got the colic-nightmare, ma'm," volunteered Mr. Mainecastle, with abrupt sympathy.

"Oh, dear! do you really think so?"

"Without a doubt of it, ma'm. Dogs can have 'em, just the same as men. Case of overfeeding. You stuff him too much, ma'm."

"Poor Topsy! do I indeed, sir?"

"No question of it, ma'm. Better stuff 'em less while living, if you're not in haste to stuff 'em for keeps when dead."

Here the widow gave a cry of consternation, and looked about her helplessly.

With a yelp and a squawk, the useless and ugly little beast had started out of her 'colic-nightmare,' and was in a fair way of going into a fit.

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried Mrs. Musgrave, clasping her hands. "I gave cook and Hilda, who always attend to her when in these spells, permission to go back to bed."

"I am quite at your service, ma'm," Mr. Mainecastle hastened to say, in his most reassuring manner. "Give the lovely little thing to me for a minute; and just don't interfere, that is all I ask. I just dote on pets, ma'm, and little pugs in particular."

He accordingly grabbed Topsy very expeditiously by the scruff of the neck, tilted back her head, and emptied the contents of a salt-cellar down her dear little throat, ramming the charge well home.

"Now, ma'm," blandly continued the detective, wholly regardless of the speechless horror

with which his fair entertainer had regarded this proceeding, "a pail of cold water is all that is required. I am very fond of little dogs—especially little pugs."

She could only motion him toward the adjoining kitchen, in which a light had been left burning, and mechanically follow him as he stepped briskly with the sufferer.

The pail of cold Croton being obtained, the detective, in spite of numerous little horrified gasps on the part of the lady, proceeded to dip and souse Topsy most thoroughly, head-downward, again and again into the water, while holding her firmly, regardless of struggles or whimpers, by her little stub of a tail.

After this heroic treatment, a vigorous rub-up with a coarse towel so far restored the little animal that she was frisky and affectionate beyond precedent, and seemingly hungry enough to devour a side of beef.

"Wonderful!" cried the now delighted widow. "Well, I never! Why, neither Hilda nor Bridget has ever been able to bring her around into such charming life and briskness."

"All in the treatment, ma'm," replied the detective, smilingly following back to the dining-room. "Besides, maybe they're not naturally fond of little dogs."

"No, they are not," decidedly. "And that's a fact. My little treasure!"

And as she resumed her seat, the restored and pampered Topsy was again in her lap with a frisking bound.

"Ah, and I am. The bare idea, ma'm, of not being fond of such an innocent, pulsating little chunk of affection and cunningness as that there little pug!"

Mrs. Musgrave began fairly to congratulate herself on her good fortune in having made this extraordinary young man's acquaintance.

But now, instead of taking his seat again, Mr. Mainecastle consulted his watch, said it was three o'clock, and, after renewing his thanks most impressively, announced that he could not think of intruding upon Mrs. Musgrave's noble and charitable generosity any further.

"You needn't go yet," she replied. "I mean that, too."

"Thank you, ma'm, but I must. It's only the fair and proper thing that I should."

"But where will you go?"

"Oh," philosophically, "it will soon be daylight, ma'm."

"I notice that you carry a very handsome and expensive watch, Mr. Mainecastle."

"You mean, ma'm, I suppose," sadly, "that it is such a one as is not exactly in keeping with the rest of my appearance?" with a doleful, but by no means shamed, look down over his sorry habiliments."

"Frankly, yes, then," with a smile; "but no offense intended."

"Oh, dear, and none taken, ma'm! But you can perhaps imagine a man clinging to one last relic of better days, even though hunger and cold, darkness and despair—a memento of departed sunshine—an heirloom perhaps reaching back through the dim dark past with a magic, golden touch that—"

"Say no more, sir!" she had risen now, and was even holding out her white, plump, aristocratic little hand. "I would not have wounded you for the world. Good-night, or, rather, good-morning, then, Mr. Mainecastle; and, if you think I can do anything to better your condition, pray do not hesitate to call upon me."

"A thousand thanks, ma'm!" replied the detective, with unaffected heartiness; for he was beginning to see, if he had not so seen from the first, that this pleasure-loving and perhaps not over-useful little lady was in possession of a noble nature and a heart of gold. "But one moment more, if you kindly will. That assertion of yours that you were well armed against possible intrusion, you know? All a bluff, was it not?"

Mrs. Musgrave turned pale; but then there was a new smile in her guest's face, which lighted it up most attractively.

"I'll tell you why I asked," he continued quietly. "You really ought to have something of the sort, living as you evidently do alone in this spacious house with no man within call. Take this. I have no further use for it."

He produced and handed her, butt foremost, his small revolver, already alluded to, adding, matter-of-factly: "It's charged for use, ma'm, and you can procure cartridges to fit it almost anywhere. Don't be afraid to use it in case of emergency. Good-night now, ma'm, and God bless you!"

But the widow's cheeks had flushed, and there was a moist brightness in her eyes that had not been there before.

"No; now you wait for me!" she said. "I shall be back in a minute."

She disappeared with his gift, and he heard her running up-stairs.

When she returned she thrust a roll of banknotes into his hand.

"Remedy your wardrobe, my friend," she said, "and return here at noon to-day. I shall have an employment to propose to you. Now good-night!"

He protested, but she wouldn't listen to him; and he went his way.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### CASTLEMAINE'S DILEMMA.

FROM Mrs. Musgrave's, Castlemaine went to his own lodgings, which he had not slept in for more than a week.

And here, before retiring, though dead worn out, as a first duty to relieve Miss Blanton's probable anxiety on his account, he forthwith penned, and even mailed without delay the following note:

"RESPECTED AND ESTEEMED FRIEND:—

"I am alive, kicking and all right, no matter what may seem or what you may hear to the contrary.

"And pray do nothing to dispel whatever impression may prevail to 'the contrary.' It is for the best.

"HENRY (G. C.)"

Then, for our exhausted and utterly done-up Silent Sifter, there was his bed and six hours of such profound, dreamless and recuperating sleep as only the toil-worn, over-taxed can know.

Up betimes, Castlemaine with a sigh of relief cast permanently aside his wretched dead man's habiliments of the previous night, assuming a quietly respectable suit from his own wardrobe, and, after a light breakfast, was down to Headquarters by ten o'clock, as good as new, to report to his chief.

"Hard enough knocks!" commented the inspector, in his laconic way; "but you have fallen on your feet as usual. When do you think you can see this thing through?"

"Probably within less than another week."

"I trust so; for the public are already calling us names, as you know."

"Words don't hurt, inspector."

"Yes, they do sometimes—one's reputation, for instance. However, go it, Castlemaine! And, in this last change of base of yours, I can only offer you one piece of standing advice," with a twinkle in the shrewd eyes, "and that by no means an original one."

"What is that, inspector?"

"The immortal Tony's injunction to his hopeful son—Beware of the vidders."

Castlemaine smiled, and perhaps a recollection of Mrs. Musgrave's charming hospitality prompted the inner confession that he might really be more in need of the injunction than his chief could have any idea of.

But he was not yet quite through with the wardrobe question.

He next went to a clothing store, where a judicious and painstaking investment of the confiding widow's money soon fitted him out with a dark gray suit that might well be taken for the half-livery of an upper man-servant in quiet and confidential employment.

He had, however, though hoping that Mrs. Musgrave was intending to engage him in that capacity, little notion as yet of the nature of her proposition to him in all its fullness.

The lady received him with a nod and smile of approval, though with more self-possession and strict regard for the seeming difference in their worldly affairs than under the novel circumstances of their first meeting.

"Come in here, Mainecastle," she said, conducting him into a small and cozy reception-room. "Now sit down, and listen to what I have to propose. In the first place, have you your recommendations?"

The detective had duly provided himself with these at Headquarters, and, on being submitted for inspection, they proved to be satisfactory.

"You have probably divined," the widow then said, "my intended proposition?"

"If it is to enter your employment, I hope I have, ma'm; and in that case I should do my best to be a good and faithful servant."

"My proposition includes something more than that," continued Mrs. Musgrave, very seriously. "You have been something of a detective in the course of your career, you told me."

"A little something in that way, ma'm."

"I have an ambition for detective-work, myself, with your assistance."

"Miss Blanton over again!" thought Castlemaine to himself. "What are we coming to?" But he only bowed, while assuming a deeply attentive aspect.

"In other words, Mainecastle," continued Mrs. Musgrave, "I shall employ you in the capacity of my man-servant here; but your chief duties will consist in confidentially assisting me—or rather piloting me—in working up a certain intricate detective case in which I am greatly interested."

"I am wholly at your service, madam."

"I suppose you would require higher wages than if merely serving me in the one capacity?" in a business-like tone.

"Not at all, ma'm."

"I would be simply your servant, implicitly subject to your orders in everything."

"That is it. What are your terms?"

"Twenty dollars a month and found, ma'm," promptly.

"You can't keep up the appearance I shall require of you on that. I'll make it forty."

"Madam, you are generosity's self. Here is something belonging to you," tendering her some bills and silver.

"What is this?"

"Your change from what you so kindly loaned me. I have rehabilitated myself, as you see," with a glance down over his now unrelievedly comely person, "and there is this much left unexpended."

"Retain it, please."

"Thank you, ma'm, no; I prefer to earn what I possess; and I hope you will speedily pay yourself back, *in toto*, out of my wages."

"But you will need some little money for running expenses while in my service."

"Then I shall ask you for it as occasion requires, ma'm."

Mrs. Musgrave took the change, carelessly placing it on the mantel-piece.

"I am glad that you are such an honest man, Mr. Mainecastle."

"So am I, ma'm. Drop the Mr., if you please. You have begun the day most properly by doing so. I am now your servant."

"And my detective," with a smile.

"At your pleasure, madam."

"Let me tell you my case at once," and Mrs. Musgrave plunged into her business with praiseworthy directness. "Are you in any way familiar, Mainecastle, with this Rorston murder-mystery, of which there has been so much talk?"

"I read the newspapers, ma'm."

"You are then somewhat familiar with the leading features of the case?"

"Better than that, ma'm, I am perfectly familiar with all the features, ma'm. It has interested me deeply from the very first."

"Come now, this is an excellent beginning. You must know, then, that the major's murderer was unquestionably one or the other of the veiled women who called upon him on that fatal morning."

"Unquestionably, ma'm."

"There were two such veiled visitors: first, a short and said to be graceful woman, next a tall and stately woman."

"True, ma'm."

"Well, here is my case in a nut-shell, Mainecastle; I want to find out, and you to assist me in finding out, who that first or shorter woman was, for I am satisfied in my own mind that she was the doer of the frightful deed."

For a single instant, Castlemaine felt his breath taken away, or as if you could knock him down with a feather, as they say.

What could this woman mean? Was it a game of stupendous bluff on her part, or might she really not have been the first or shorter veiled visitor herself?—a doubt of which had scarcely ever as yet entered his own thoughts. Besides, was not there the mate of the fatal pistol still in her possession, as verified by her own niece, in all but indisputable proof of this?

His face, however, was merely expressive of great interest as he replied:

"A task of no little difficulty, ma'm, but to be carried through successfully, I hope."

"You have doubtless your own impression as to which of those veiled visitors committed the murder?" she asked, abruptly;

"Yes, ma'm, I have."

"Which?"

"The last, or taller and statelier of the two, ma'm."

"There is where you are wrong, in my opinion, and I will tell you why."

"I chance to know the identity of that woman. You perceive that I am being perfectly confidential with you, Mainecastle."

"You can be so with perfect safety, ma'm, and I trust, with profit."

"That woman was a certain Mrs. Delamour."

"Ah; a friend of yours, ma'm?"

"Not exactly: rather an intimate acquaintance. Now here is the case. This Mrs. Delamour, whom I know, from certain unguarded admissions on her part, to have been the taller and second visitor upon the murdered man, but whom I do not even for an instant suspect of having killed him—indeed, I am quite certain of the contrary—does suspect me of having been the shorter first visitor, and consequently that I was his assassin. You begin to follow me?"

"Thoroughly, ma'm."

"Now, if she entertains this suspicion against me, others may do the same, especially these professional detectives, who are so sharp nowadays."

"Very possibly, ma'm."

"You can, therefore, judge how anxious I am to discover the real identity of that shorter first visitor of the major's—and his assassin, as I haven't a doubt—in order to save myself from the horrible notoriety which the growth of such a suspicion against myself would bring about. Why, it would be nothing less than my death I couldn't survive it, sir!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### TRUTH OR UNTRUTH.

MRS. MUSGRAVE had grown nervously excited. With flushed cheeks and tears in her pretty eyes, she arose and paced the floor, much as a man would have done, and just as Castlemaine remembered Miss Blanton to have done in his presence, under such very similar circumstances.

He respectfully besought her to be calm, and, after he had succeeded, in a measure, and she had resumed her seat, he said:

"As I have told you, ma'm, I have made myself thoroughly familiar with this case, through a careful study of the newspaper reports, comments, and theories that have appeared from day to day."

"Yes?"

"Moreover, I may say that I have thought over it, with my practical detective experience as my guide, and have therefore formed certain theories and deductions of my own that may possibly be of some value."

"I haven't a doubt of it. Let me have them."

"But I shall first wish to understand your own impressions in the matter to the full, ma'm."

"Question me unreservedly."

"Thank you, ma'm; just what I was going to suggest. In the first place, then, there is the derringer pistol, now in the hands of Inspector Byrnes, I presume, with which the murder was indisputably committed?"

"Undoubtedly," with the utmost *sangfroid*; "and I haven't a doubt that I have the mate of it in my possession."

"You, madam?"

"Yes; and Mrs. Delamour knows this. She was once or twice left alone in my dressing-room—I have never taken any particular pains to conceal my possession of the weapon—and she doubtless seized the opportunity to make herself aware of the fact. Hence, and perhaps naturally, her suspicion that I was her immediate predecessor in the major's room on that fatal morning, and was consequently his slayer; though, of course, she is careful to conceal this suspicion from me, or thinks that she is so concealing it."

"I am at liberty to go on with my queries with absolute unreserve?"

"It is my express desire."

"Might she have any other grounds for this suspicion—in the way of supplying you with a motive, for instance?"

"Yes."

"You, then, had cause for personal hostility toward the man?"

"A cold-blooded, ruthless, blackmailing villain, sir!"

"With all my heart, ma'm!"

"Yes, I had such cause," with angry frankness. "To such a degree, in fact, that I could that is, I think I could—have been perfectly capable of shooting him myself, if some one else had not done so."

"May I inquire into the nature of that hostility, ma'm?"

Mrs. Musgrave colored, bit her lip and hesitated. She, however, went on resolutely, with but a slight pause:

"A half confidence is worse than none. Yes, you shall know all, Mainecastle, even to the extent of a personal humiliation on my part."

"Oh, madam!" deprecatingly; "but—"

"Peace! it shall be so. Your delicacy of manner convinces me more and more that I am not misplacing my trust in you. Besides," with a sudden flashing, passionate, underlidded look, which he was wholly at a loss to understand, "I need a true friend—some one to unbosom myself to at last—and you may one day discover a now unsuspected reason for my choosing to make a friend of you, and on such slight acquaintance."

The detective bowed his humble acknowledgments.

"Did you ever hear of my Newport diamond case?" abruptly inquired the lady.

He looked up with assumed eagerness.

"Yes," he replied. "Indeed, when you were so condescending as to first tell me your name, ma'm, I fell to wondering if it could be the same lady of the name in connection with that case."

She inclined her head.

"This will somewhat simplify matters," she said. "Listen now. A few days before my diamonds were missing, I found a case containing two derringer pistols in my villa dressing-room."

"Of my numerous summer guests, I could only think of one who, having the occasional freedom of my rooms, might have left the pistols there inadvertently."

"This was a young gentleman, Mr. Tom Raston by name, somewhat given to pistol practice, of whom I thought very highly, and who had been paying much attention to my niece, Miss Blanton, also one of my privileged guests."

"But he was only there off and on, and at the time of my discovery was absent. After a brief examination of its contents, I therefore put the case to one side, thinking that he would ask for it sooner or later. But he did not, and I had almost forgotten the circumstance when it was forcibly recalled by the more important incident of my loss of the diamonds a few days, later."

"You remember the main feature of the case?"

"Only this, ma'm, to the best of my recollection," answered the detective—"that the jewels were never recovered, and that your maid, one Sally Brown, was generally credited with having carried them off."

"Correct; but there is a connecting feature—a feature connecting the robbery with this subsequent murder, it is my firm belief—that I have thus far treasured as my exclusive secret, which I am now about to make known to you."

"With the disappearance of my jewels, or at least soon after they were missed, Sally Brown disappeared. So did one of the derringers out of its case."

"Hallo!" exclaimed the detective, momentarily forgetting his new role in his surprise at what he heard.

"Ah, you are surprised, Mainecastle?" cried Mrs. Musgrave, with a satisfied air.

"Indeed I am, ma'm!"

"And now cannot you guess whom I may suspect as having been that first veiled visitor at Major Rorston's rooms, and consequently his murderer, no less than the purloiner of my diamonds?"

"This same fugitive young woman, Sally Brown, as a matter of course," slowly, and after a reflective pause.

"Still, you speak somewhat doubtfully," in a disappointed tone.

"With due deference, ma'm, I must know more in order to agree with you more unreservedly."

"The pistol—"

"Not quite enough, ma'm, though a strong incriminating point. You don't know that she stole the pistol, any more than you know absolutely that she stole the diamonds."

The detective's mind was more or less in a state of doubt, and regarding Mrs. Musgrave herself, of which the latter could have no suspicion. Was she honest or dishonest in this matter? Was it truth or untruth, this story of hers regarding the missing weapon? This was his debate with himself, while outwardly so calm and complacent. True, her frankness at the outset was immensely in her favor, and he would much rather believe her sincere than the reverse—in fact, he was already more than half in love with her, for that matter, and she might yet become the one grand passion of his heart and life. But thus far at least, that was all.

"True," assented Mrs. Musgrave, reluctantly.

"But then, on the supposition that we are certain of her having stolen both?"

"Ah, that is different. Now let us supply the fugitive with a motive for hatred of Rorston, for a desire of revenge upon him, and we have her dead, as the saying goes."

"It can be inferred!" eagerly. "There was a rumor that he had secretly married her; and it was an open enough secret that, even if such were the case, he never recognized her in the remotest way—would, in fact, have been ashamed to do so."

"Ah, that is nearer to it—a little nearer."

"But there is yet more. I am quite certain, of my own knowledge, that he had never actually married the young woman, though he ought to have done so in common honor, and though she had frequently begged him to do so."

"You are sure of this, ma'm?"

"Rorston confessed as much to me with his own lips. He was also one of my guests at the time, as were likewise Mrs. Delamour and her suitor, Mr. Severne-Hartlieth, of both of whom you may have heard."

"Mainecastle" bowed an affirmative.

"A strong corroborative point, ma'm," he assented, "were the major to be believed. From what I have heard of his character, I, for one, would not have believed him on oath."

"Neither would I," quickly; "but wait. It was because he did not make the confidence to me on oath that I did believe him."

"How, ma'm?"

"Can't you understand? He made his confession in such a manner—with a libertine cold-bloodedness," indignantly, even in the recollection, "that I could not help believing him, and at the same time ordering him out of my presence with contempt and scorn! Would that I had also ordered him out of my house then and there!" passionately.

#### CHAPTER XXVII.

##### MRS. MUSGRAVE FINISHES HER CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURES.

The detective had suddenly looked up, while Mrs. Musgrave was still speaking, a kindling look in his face and eyes that was a reflex of her own animation and excitement.

"Say no more, ma'm!" he said. "I succumb. Yes, in that manner I believe the man to have been capable of the truth. Our case against the Brown young woman is mighty strong."

"But wait yet again," cried Mrs. Musgrave, with renewed eagerness. "My maid herself subsequently made a similar confession to me."

"What! to the effect that she was not married to Rorston—pardon the words, madam!—but ought to be?"

"Just that!" triumphantly.

"Oh, Mrs. Musgrave, if you can only prove this on occasion!" cried the detective, wholly forgetting his new role for the moment, and thinking only of the plot that was impending over Nelly Blanton; "it will be of far more im-

portance than you can conceive. In fact—" he paused, biting his lip.

"What do you mean, Mainecastle?" she was looking at him very keenly and curiously, and with a peculiar smile. "I don't quite understand."

"Of course not, ma'm—that is—you see—" But she kindly came to the aid of his confusion by disregarding it.

"Ah, I see," indifferently. "You must have made yourself even more intimately familiar with these things than you were willing to acknowledge. So much the better. It will assist us to a better common understanding. Now, to resume, I have only my recollection of the girl's positive confession to me, and I could swear to it on occasion. Would that do?"

"Yes, yes; it would be enough. Madam, relieve your mind forthwith. The Brown young woman—the thief and the murderer—and I shall bunt her down for you!"

"Ab, if you only may! But wait yet again. I was to tell you of my own cause of hostility to that man. It was this: He had obtained a verbal secret of mine from a former friend of my deceased husband—a friend who has since died likewise. It was a family secret—such a one that might possibly, if made public, have seriously affected the inheritance I am at present enjoying. Need I say more?"

"Not a word, ma'm; nor need you have said so much. Enough for me that the secret could not possibly have affected your womanly integrity and honor."

"Thank you, sir; but how do you know that?"

The detective, for a wonder, and much to his self-contempt, could only blush, stammer, and make the poorest sort of an evasion.

However, Mrs. Musgrave appeared far from displeased at his confusion, whose significance she perhaps read better than he himself.

"Thank you again for your high opinion of me," she went on quietly. "Now we are back to our starting, namely. Mrs. Delamour's evident sincere belief in my identity with that short first veiled visitor at the Piccadilly, and consequently Major Rorston's assassin."

"Just so, ma'm; and she might make trouble for you, which you wish to avoid?"

"That is about it."

"It shall be arranged. I judge, ma'm, that this Mrs. Delamour is not exactly of your sort?"

"Well, I have made a good deal of her; and she has a quasi entrance into the best society."

"Still, I infer that you hardly consider her your social equal, in your own private opinion?"

"By no means!" decidedly.

"In other words, while you are a lady of assured and enviable social position, this Mrs. Delamour might be—" he paused interrogatively.

"Yes, an adventuress; though I did not suspect this when she was my guest at Newport. Since then, I haven't so much cared, either. I am a very independent little woman, my friend," with a smile; "perhaps with a reprehensible carelessness as to the inner lives of such who are only complaisant enough to contribute to my pleasures."

The detective had not been able to conceal a flush of pleasure at being addressed at last as my friend—something that was not lost on the keen-eyed little widow.

"Might you have possibly incurred the secret dislike of this Mrs. Delamour, ma'm?" he inquired.

"Oh, no; I think not."

"And she might not be willing to get you in her power, as they say?"

"Ah, I am not certain of that. Pauline is poor—lives on her wits, with Mr. Hartlieth's help, most probably—with expensive tastes—already owes me quite a large sum of borrowed money, and—well, I would not like to have her think me in her power."

"Neither would I. What about this Mr. Hartlieth, ma'm?"

"Oh, a man-about-town, perhaps a gambler—an Englishman as big as a house!" carelessly.

"I don't know."

"He had some business connection with Rorston, I believe?"

"So I have heard—little enough to his credit, that!"

"This verbal secret which Rorston held against you—as I may say for form's sake—have you reasons to believe that it died with him, ma'm?"

"I can only hope so."

"And yet you apprehend that he might have communicated something of its purport to this Mrs. Delamour?"

"Yes, that is my trouble; but still not enough to cause me more than an inconvenience. It would have had to be proclaimed by Rorston's lips, and with circumstantial additions, to have really or greatly injured me."

"Still, this as showing a motive, would aid her in strengthening her suspicions against you in the murder case?"

"Very probably."

"And Hartlieth is likely to have mastered that much, too?"

"I fear so."

"Of course, there is one thing—consummation devoutly to be wished—that could straighten this whole tangle out forthwith."

"Ah, the cigarette-fiend, who must have witnessed the deed?"

"Just so; and I shall pay him a visit to-day, as my first step in your service."

Mrs. Musgrave clapped her plump little hands together.

"Excellent!" she exclaimed, with animation. "And I shall accompany you. Ah! it will be almost like being a detective myself."

Castlemaine did not express his opinion of this proposition one way or the other.

"Madam," said he, very seriously, "will you permit me to tender some advice to you as to your future action with these people?"

"What people?"

"The Hartlieths—or I should say Mrs. Delamour and Mr. Hartlieth."

"Oh, well," with her quick smile, "you would advise me to break off with them?"

"Exactly; but not too abruptly. I would rather advise circumspection and even dissimulation, first."

"Thank you; perhaps I have already been exercising more of those qualities than you think for."

And then Mrs. Musgrave started, as there was a ring at the street bell.

"Dear me, that is Mr. Delamour now; I feel sure of it. Go and open for her, Mainecastle. You might as well begin your service at once; both my serving-women know of my intention to employ you. What are you waiting for?"

Castlemaine, forgetting his expertness at facial transformations, had risen in a momentary panic.

"Certainly, ma'm—that is, I am going. But would you kindly forget to address me by name in the lady's presence?"

"What? eh? But yes, if you wish it. Go!"

A moment later, on her new servant's gravely ushering in Mrs. Delamour, the little widow stared at him with unmitigated astonishment over her visitor's shoulder, while participating in the greeting kiss, and could scarcely credit that it was not some entirely different individual in the Mainecastle shoes and new clothes.

In other words, Castlemaine had suddenly assumed one of those physiognomical changes for which he was somewhat famous among his brother detectives, and during the assumption of which it was doubtful if his own mother would have known him.

However, he momentarily flashed his countenance back to its original expression, for the widow's special enlightenment behind her visitor's back, and then, after receiving a sign from her that she would expect him to lurk within hearing, he solemnly disappeared.

"What! and you are also indulging in a man-servant, Janet?" observed Mrs. Delamour, after the customary nothings had been exchanged.

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Musgrave. "I have long been thinking of increasing my domestic establishment to this extent, and—well," with an indifferent smile, "I can afford it, and there's nothing like putting on a little fresh style."

"Happy woman that can afford anything! However, it's an odd coincidence."

"What is, Pauline?"

"That you should take a man-servant just when the Blantons have lost theirs."

"The Blantons lost theirs!" repeated Mrs. Musgrave. "What, that precise and useful man, Henry, whom both Mr. Blanton and Nelly thought so much of?"

The visitor nodded, and as she did so her hostess noticed that she was not looking at her best.

"Well, it's the first I've heard of it," continued Mrs. Musgrave, still surprised. "And they had a sort of sensation in there last night, too—an attempted burglary, or something of the sort. In fact, it's a wonder that Nelly hasn't been in to tell me something about it."

"A burglary? Indeed! But that is nothing to our sensation at the Perthshire. Horrible!" And Mrs. Delamour gave a pronounced shudder.

"What is the matter, Pauline? You are not looking well."

"A tragedy in our apartment building, Janet! Here is an evening extra with an account of it." She produced and held out a newspaper. "Read it for yourself."

"Not if it is really tragic!" exclaimed Mrs. Musgrave, recoiling. "You read it aloud for me, Pauline—that is, if you feel able to."

Mrs. Delamour accordingly did so. The report was sensational, but brief, merely recording the finding and identification of the dead body by the janitor in the elevator well at an early hour of the morning.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

"ALMOST A SISTER TO HER."

"THIS is terrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Musgrave. "What could the poor man have been doing in the great building there at night?"

"Justine has thrown some light on that. It

seems that the fellow has been visiting her of afternoons, during my absence. We think that he may have contrived to get himself locked in the building, most likely for a felonious or other improper purpose, and then fallen down the shaft during the night. It is simply awful! I don't know whether to dismiss Justine or not. But she is wildly penitent. Perhaps I shall even decide to move away. I don't know when I have had such a shock." And Mrs. Delamour had recourse to her smelling-salts.

"But are they quite sure it was Mr. Blanton's Henry?"

"Not a doubt of it. Chiefly identified by livery, I believe—face unrecognizable. Mr. Blanton himself was sent for, and had no doubt of the poor wretch's identity. Then the coroners, the policemen, the reporters, the sight-seers, the horror-mongers—Oh, we will talk of something else, my dear Janet, or I shall have a fit of hysterics, I know I shall!"

"And Nelly thought so much of the man!" soliloquized Mrs. Musgrave. "I know they all thought him an invaluable servant. And all this after that last night's trouble of hers! Why has she not been to tell me about it? Well, then I shall have to go there!"

"You said something of a burglary in at the Blantons," interposed the visitor, languidly. "Is that Miss Blanton's trouble that you allude to?"

"Yes. It seems that the house was really entered, though the only thing carried off was that package of letters which she had had the quarrel with Major Rorston about."

"You don't tell me so! But this is most strange."

"Yes, yes, dear; but really that is all I know. Let us talk of something else, as you suggested."

"With all my heart, Janet!" And then Mrs. Musgrave's visitor suddenly clasped her in her arms with the most unexpected effusiveness. "Oh, my dear, I am very unhappy!" she half-sobbed. "And who should I come to but you, my more than friend—almost a sister to me?"

"Oh, ah! yes, I suppose so, Pauline," wheezed out the little widow, by no means over-pleased at this demonstrativeness, and strugglingly disengaging herself. "But you needn't altogether smother one in stating your trouble. There; that is more civilized-like, if somewhat less affectionate and emotional. Now, what is the nature of your trouble, my dear?"

"Oh, Janet!" reproachfully; "so harsh, and we heretofore almost like sisters, as one might say?"

"Well, as some one might say, perhaps," "with a rather discouraging little laugh. "But can't you speak out? for I wasn't harsh one bit, and you ought to know it."

"Perhaps not, then," tearfully—"perhaps only my distempered imagination. Good Lord! if you could know how unstrung and wretched generally I feel over these terrible happenings!"

"But you are not telling me your present trouble, Pauline."

"The same ghastly annoyance, my dear; my English remittances again behindhand—expenses threatening from every quarter—Severne-Hartlieth likewise short; too much so to think of assisting me, as he solemnly avers. It's just the fact, my dear," quite desperately, "that I am quite distracted—don't know what to do, or where to turn."

"Ah, indeed!" said Mrs. Musgrave, quite unsympathetically.

"I only want another thou, Janet," pitifully; "and I'll be sure to pay you back within a fortnight."

"Can't think of doing it, my dear. Only another thou, indeed! Your last promised fortnight, my dear, has lengthened out to six weeks, and you've never even mentioned the thou and a half you borrowed of me then."

"But what is it to you, Janet—a bagatelle?"

"Not to be made ducks and drakes of, at all events. I can't let you have any more money, Mrs. Delamour." This with quiet decisiveness.

"You mean that?" exclaimed Mrs. Delamour, suddenly rising with angry frigidity.

"Indeed I do, Mrs. Delamour."

The great blonde was magnificent in her disdain, but the little widow, who had also risen, was not the woman to be overawed, more especially in her own house, and with a dozen or more stiff bank-accounts at her plump little back.

"This insult to me, after—" This much in her grandest way, and then the Delamour paused, with something suggestively sinister or threatening in her break-off.

"After what?" cried Mrs. Musgrave, spiritedly. "Come, now, Pauline; I am at a loss to see how you can construct an insult out of my simple refusal to supply you with more money, which you seem to take no thought of ever repaying. But what were you about to say? I insist on knowing—after what?"

"Mrs. Musgrave," coolly, "it is quite evident that you either don't appreciate or don't understand the kindly, I may say the considerate, generous forbearance I have exercised to you."

"I certainly don't understand what never existed," cried the little widow, more angrily than

ever. "Forbearance, indeed! Why, you are talking like a fool, or a madwoman!"

"You think so?"

"Woman! what do you mean?"

A cold laugh, and then: "Could I not, if I chose—" after which another significant, insulting pause.

"Mrs. Delamour!" exclaimed the widow, pale with rage, and the calmer on that account, "if you do not instantly explain your implied threats, I shall feel compelled to call my servants and have you ignominiously expelled from my house."

A low, insulting laugh now, and then: "Who fired the shot that murdered Clarence Rorston?" combined with a sweeping movement toward the door.

"You did, for all I know to the contrary!" fairly screamed Mrs. Musgrave, making a step or two after her insulter, with her hands clinched. "I certainly believe you to have been capable of it—adventuress!"

But the Delamour, already half through the doorway, only turned to confront her with calm disdain.

"Do not fear me—quite yet, Janet Musgrave," she said, softly, almost sweetly. "The secret of the missing pistol, and that pistol's mate, it is safe with me—for the present."

But here there was a light touch on her Amazonian shoulder from behind, and she wheeled to confront the wonderfully contorted and sphinx-like countenance of her hostess's new man-servant.

"If you please, ma'm," said the man, with the profoundest bow, in which there was observable just the faintest suggestion of travesty, "is it your wish that I should see you to the street-door?"

She gave him a contemptuous look, and, without glancing again at the indignant little widow, swept grandly away.

"Mainecastle," said Mrs. Musgrave, as she watched the door close upon one she felt that she must now regard as her implacable and perhaps even dangerous foe, "come in here a moment now; you overheard all, as I intended you should?" she inquired, as he followed her back into the reception-room.

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CIGARETTE FIEND.

"EVERY word, ma'm," was the prompt response.

"You were right about the woman, after all, Mainecastle. She had to display her venom at last."

"Yes, ma'm."

The little widow had been more disturbed by the interview than she would have been willing to confess. She looked at her new servant all but appealingly—one might have thought entreatingly.

"Perhaps I was too harsh, Mainecastle—perhaps I should not have precipitated matters?"

"Not a bit of it, ma'm!" exclaimed the detective, with wholesome heartiness. "After all, it couldn't have turned out better for you. Dear ma'm, may I rely on you not being too inquisitive if I say something that may brighten up your sweet face a bit?"

"Why, yes, Mainecastle! What do you mean?"

"This, ma'm!" he turned down his thumb suggestively, "I have already got that bold, bad woman down under just so, if she did but guess it—which fortunately she doesn't—and in my own good time I'll crush, crunch, mash, smash and squeeze the poisonous life out of her and hers!"

"Oh, it's good to hear you speak so bravely and confidently, Mainecastle!" said Mrs. Musgrave, already brightening up wonderfully. "But I fear," with a smile, "you have somewhat deceived me, Mainecastle, with regard to your professed ignorance of these things."

"You promised not to be inquisitive, ma'm," murmured the detective, lowering his eyes.

"No; only not to be too inquisitive, Mainecastle," with another smile. "However, have no fear of your new mistress being inconsiderate with you, my friend."

"Oh, ma'm, as if I could—God bless you, ma'm!"

"And now, Mainecastle, for that visit to our little cigarette fiend. I shall dress for the drive, while you are ordering my carriage. It is at—" she mentioned the livery stable address, "and you can call for me directly at Mr. Blanton's house."

When the detective called there accordingly with the equipage half an hour later, Mrs. Musgrave was in the act of saying good-by to her niece on the piazza of the latter's home.

"And this is your man-servant, Aunt Janet?" observed Miss Blanton, as they saw him ceremoniously approaching them up the walk. Nelly was looking anxious and distressed, if not ill, from the alarm of the previous night. She had received the detective's brief note of explanation, it is true, even before learning of the alleged finding of 'Henry's' mutilated remains, but only to be rather mystified than relieved by it, and could not even now but think that it

## Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.

might be a trick of the enemy, and Castlemaine really no more. "What an odd expression he has—all puckered and twisted up! Perhaps there is something the matter with him."

Mrs. Musgrave only smiled, for she had noticed the facial transformation that her incomprehensible Mainecastle was again indulging himself in."

"I think not, my dear," she replied. "But I confess that my new servant—" she recollects herself in time, and abstained of her own accord from mentioning him by name—"is altogether an odd sort of a genius. Good-by, my dear."

As she turned down the walk, however, obsequiously followed by her odd sort of a genius, a surprised little exclamation from the young lady caused her to look back.

Castlemaine, in fact, had surreptitiously given Miss Blanton a reassuring glimpse of his true face, accompanied by a warning gesture.

"What is it, Nelly? You are looking rather queerly. Anything the matter with my cloak or dress?"

"No, auntie; everything all right."

The carriage made its first stop at the Piccadilly Bachelor Apartment House, after the brisk but rather long down-town drive.

"Why, I thought we were going direct to some hospital, Mainecastle," observed Mrs. Musgrave, as her attendant sprung from his seat by the liveried driver to open the coach door for her. "What place is this? Ah!" interestingly, as her glance took in the carved name over the stylish entrance.

"Yes, ma'm. I ventured to think, ma'm, that it might be well to speak with Mr. O'Goolerhan, the young man's father, first, ma'm. He is the janitor here."

"Oh, indeed! Well, perhaps, it is just as well. I'll leave you to do most of the talking, Mainecastle, if there is to be any, though I trust there will not be a great deal. I hate preliminaries."

Mr. O'Goolerhan seemed to feel nervously complimented on learning that the elegant lady's visit was for himself, instead of some one of his nobby tenants, and yet he wore a generally dejected and hopeless air.

"This way, ma'm, if ye'll be so kind an' condescending, ma'm!" he said, bowing and scraping at a great rate whils ushering them into his little official den, just a little to one side from the vestibule and elevator entrance—it would have been called a porter's lodge in a French city. "Sure, an' it's mighty honored I fale, ma'm, boy this condescension to a poor mon loike myself, ma'm, wi'd divil a blood-rilative in the wurld, ma'm, but wan talinted son, an' he but daft now. Och, wurra, wurra! Long loife to yez, ma'm, an' m'y your party shaddy never dwindle at all, at all!"

He shook his head mournfully. But while its janitor had so changed that he seemed to have aged a year in a week, the great Piccadilly was as sprucely and aristocratically bachelor-like as ever, so that no one would have dreamed, from outward appearances, of the tragic associations that had drooped around it but eight or ten days previous.

"My mistress, sir," explained the detective, with ceremonious stiffness and a timely resumption of his facial contortions, as against a possible liveliness of recollection on the little old man's part, "is charitably interested in the condition of your unfortunate son. She decided to speak with you before visiting the hospital where he is."

Mr. O'Goolerhan shook his head again, though repeating his acknowledgments for the "condescension."

"No good, no good, Oi'm afeard, ma'm!" he crooned. "They's other ladies o' the quality condescended to inspect the poor b'y, ma'm, but no good, no good. Och, ma'm, an' as talinted a broth av a b'y—talinted wi'd aither pen, spache or pencil—as ye'll foind in a day's drive."

"Does your son make no improvement, then?" asked Mrs. Musgrave, in her kindly and winning way.

"Not much, ma'm, save wi'd the pincils or the charcoal, ma'm. The docthors do say as he may come out of the devil's drame that's becloudin' his foine intellects, but Oi fail to take much hope, ma'm. It's on'y the picters, the picters, the picters wid him all the day long, an' apart from his hoigh art, it's never out of the hazin', drivelin' shpell that he comes, ma'm."

"Your son, then, has talent for drawing, it seems."

"Och, ma'm, talint, is it? He's the wurld's jaynus, is me Jemmy! Landshkapes or portraints, it's all wan wid him. Sure his mastherpave afore he was tuk bad, ma'm, was that admired by the connysors—it ripresinted the Quane of England, ma'm—bad 'cess to her!—in the act o' bein' clubbed to death by Misher Par nell—long loife to him—while Donnyvan O'Rossa an' John L. Soolivan war kapin' the whole murtherin' British army an' navy at bay wid shwivel guns an' torpaydoes. Och, picters is it— Thankee, ma'm!"

His fair visitor had cut him short with a very acceptable little present; and, a little later on, she had the satisfaction of judging of Jemmy's "hoigh art" achievements for herself, under the detective's assiduous guidance.

These were of more account than Mrs. Musgrave—who understood art and was herself a sketcher of no mean ability—could have any notion of from Mr. O'Goolerhan's rather bizarre descriptions.

The cigarette fiend was even at his artistic pastime when they called to see him. The whole end of a disused ward, that was presently to be made over, had been allotted to his vagaries, and here he was found industriously covering such unpictured spaces of the dirty white wall as were left to him with charcoal sketches at a great rate.

Pale, absorbed, little more than skin and bone, there was, nevertheless, a certain steadfast, ambitious fire in the deep-set, dark eyes which he bent upon his work, and there was something pathetic in his absorption therein.

An odd thing at once noticeable was that, though the sketcher worked near a wide-open window, affording a noble river-view close at hand, and frequently threw his glance thitherward, as if painstakingly picturing the scene spread out below and beneath him, his actual employment was upon sketch after sketch of human faces and figures, doubtless fancy-born.

"It's mostly the way with the poor little chap," explained the orderly who had accompanied the visitors from the hospital office. "Yonder's a craft or two upon the wall that he drawed when we first let him get at the work. But it's mostly only men and women as he drors an' paints, though you'd think from the way he squints out of the winder so much that he'd git his idees altogether out of the river yonder."

Mrs. Musgrave gave her servant a significant glance, and he soon got rid of the attendant's presence by the use of a liberal *douceur* or tip from the purse which she took occasion to slip into his hands.

This left them unembarrassedly alone in the great empty room with the artistic patient, who, however, from the very first had hardly paid the slightest attention to them. In fact, he seemed scarcely aware even of their presence.

"I wish I could secure his interest, or even his attention, a little," said the lady to her companion, in a low voice. "I have a certain idea, by which we might possibly profit something through his sense of art."

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### A FLASH OUT OF A DARKENED MIND.

"ARE his pictures really of any account, ma'm?" asked Castlemaine, with a rather dubious look at the sketches.

"No, but he has real facility which with cultivation might amount to something," was the reply. "One or two of those heads are not bad at all, and that woman's figure he is just finishin' off has a certain rude grace. His touch, too, is marvelously delicate and confident. Indeed, I am not sure but those rough images might be real likenesses out of his clouded memory. If we could only secure his interest or attention!"

"I think I can manage it, ma'm," observed the detective, thoughtfully. "You are wearing your rings under your glove, I perceive, ma'm."

"Yes."

"Could you let me have one of 'em for a minute, please?—a diamond ring were perhaps best for the experiment."

She ungloved her hand and offered him a superb cluster-ring, with which he brusquely stepped up behind the absorbed patient.

"Here, Jemmy, Jemmy, my man!" he said, kindly drawing him about-face and flashing the jewel under his eyes. "Diamonds, diamonds, d'ye see? Don't you remember?"

"Ha! ha! diamonds, diamonds!" muttered the youth, making a vague pass at the gem with the hand in which he still held the crayon pencil. "Yes, yes; how they shine, how they glitter and gleam! Got any cigarettes—only one or two, you know?" pleadingly.

Then he seemed to forget his craving demand, and, with a wide-eyed, momentary stare at the detective's fair and elegantly-dressed companion, he turned back to his drawing, though with less fixedness than before.

"That will do—a good idea!" said Mrs. Musgrave. "Now let me try."

She took back the ring, replaced it, and then, stepping up to the wall, took up a scrap of charcoal in the hand that sparkled with that and kindred rings, began to sketch directly at the young man's side, with a swift, expert touch.

"See, Jemmy!" she said, flashing her kindly eyes upon him occasionally while she drew; "diamonds! diamonds! Yes, how they glitter and gleam and shine! and now watch what a picture will grow under my hand and out of their beautiful brightness, Jemmy."

"Ha!" he had come to a pause, pencil in hand, and was gazing at her production with fitful interest. "What? eh? No, no; woman—lady! how dare you?" recoiling, with a terrified shudder, yet still with fixed, appalled eyes fastened upon the sketch that had grown to rough life under her swift, clever touch.

Castlemaine, who now began to perceive his shrewd mistress's drift, was scarcely less interested.

It was a picture of the murdered Rorston—

done with rough but life-like vigor and realism—freshly slain, newly fallen back upon the lounge, with ghastly upturned face and outstretched, helpless hands, the wound indicated in his breast.

"It's wonderful, ma'm!" exclaimed the detective, under his breath. "One might say—" with a faint tinge of the old suspicion in his thoughts, if not in his voice—"you might have witnessed the scene with your own eyes. He looked just that way when first found—or when I first saw him, before the attitude could have been materially disturbed by the examining surgeon."

"Ah!" without turning her face to him; "another unintentional give-away on your part, Mainecastle, eh? But you don't consider the guessableness of a woman's intuition. Here, Jemmy, look, look! There is nothing to be alarmed at. You and I shall complete the sketch together. Diamonds, diamonds, eh? Perhaps they were on exhibition in this way. Look sharp now."

She had continued to sketch with amazing rapidity, and presently the writing-table, that had been described in the newspapers as occupying the center of the fatal chamber, not far from the dead man's position, came out in bold and strong relief.

The detective drew in a long, gratified breath. The table, as represented, was of a pattern entirely different from that that had figured in the actual scene, though of a near enough general resemblance to be in ordinary featural keeping with the rest.

"See, Jemmy, see!" continued the lady, pleasantly. "You shall perform your part presently. We are coming to it, coming, coming!"

Jemmy's terror had gradually become replaced with wonder, and even delighted interest.

"Good, good!" he cried under his breath. "Yes, that is it all over again. The glitter and shine of them!"

The table had now received a half-opened jewel-case, from which the precious contents were made to cast forth diamond-rays in pretty fair counterfeit presentment.

"Patience, Jemmy, patience!" Mrs. Musgrave went on to murmur, softly and cooingly, her busy crayon never for an instant resting in its swift sketching strokes. "So, and what have we now? A wardrobe, eh, with one of its doors held wide open, and—but wait, wait!"

But here the pallid youth uttered a strange, low cry, his hands clasped, his attentive eye half-frightened, half-fascinated.

In addition to the wardrobe, there was the portrait of Jemmy himself in the act of being thrust, back-foremost into it by a woman's hand, with no connecting arm or body, strongly clutching his shoulder, while another bodiless hand was presenting a small pistol to his head.

"No, no!" ejaculated Jemmy, breathlessly: "not quite right. No pistol for Jemmy—that had killed the poor major, it's bullet was gone—but a knife, a dagger. Ugh!" with a shudder.

"Don't be frightened, my dear, for it is your turn now. Come; I shall let you supply the missing figure, and then the whole grand picture will be your own."

"Oh, but I can't, ma'm!" hanging back diffidently while she was gently urging him to the requisite artistic standpoint. "You draw so beautifully; I can't ever do the other figure in there—the horrible young woman, with her vail half-off—without spoiling it."

"Nonsense, my dear! Can't you, indeed? See those capital things you have already done over there. Why, you are bound to be a great artist, perhaps!"

"Oh, ma'm, you really think so?" Still hesitating.

"Think so? I am sure of it. Come; here you are. Now a few first strokes with that cunning hand and faithful memory of yours, and—" But Jemmy had already begun to draw, and with feverish energy and scarcely anticipated fidelity, at that.

Mrs. Musgrave and her companion stood back watching him intently, and scarcely venturing to breathe lest the spell should snap, the flash out of that darkened memory die away in useless flickerings, but the strangely prompted work went busily, unremittingly on.

The bodiless pistol-hand was erased, and another hand substituted, with a dagger menacingly held at the pictured youth's throat.

Then came the connecting arms, then the short, slight, graceful female figure, in neat street-dress, belonging to them, and lastly the face—yes, undoubtedly the face of Clarence Rorston's actual murderer—with enough of its floating vail tossed back to reveal the pretty, but sternly threatening lineaments, and the murder-mystery of the Piccadilly Bachelor Apartment House was no longer a hoarded secret in one guilty human breast.

The lady and her companion had made the recognition at the same instant, and were looking at each other with startled, gratified eyes.

"Come!" exclaimed Mrs. Musgrave, a little huskily. "Good heavens! I had half expected it, but it is terrible. If seems like a finger of fate pointing back to us out of the tomb!"

She thrust a handful of silver into the boy's

hand—he was still partly engaged upon the sketch, though with dilatory and fast deadening touches—and then hurried away with her escort.

At the head of a stairway just outside the open door was another visitor—a lady, whose face was veiled, and whom Castlemaine glanced at with a quick look of surprise—with the orderly in attendance.

"Yes, I have heard about the poor boy's picture-making, and am deeply interested in his case, but you needn't accompany further, sir," they heard her say, in a pleasant but what might have been an assumed voice, as they descended the stair, accompanied by a suspicious chink, as of the passing of coin. "That will do. I shall make but a very brief study of the poor young man."

The waiting-room connected with the hospital office was near the foot of the stairs, and Castlemaine made a beseeching sign to his mistress that they should enter.

"I want to catch another glimpse of that young woman as she passes down and out," he whispered, as they entered the room. "Nothing like making sure of a face, ma'm."

She looked at him with surprise, but waited at his side without speaking.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### THE COST OF THE CALLED-BACK FLASH.

BUT, though the orderly soon descended the stairs alone, they waited long and impatiently without any signs of the veiled visitor's reappearance.

Castlemaine beckoned to the man, who, having already been "sweetened" at their first entrance into the ward above, promptly joined them in the waiting room.

"The lady whom you just attended up yonder?" queried the detective, slipping into his hand a dollar note, which his mistress had given him; "is this her first visit, perhaps, upon your queer little picture-maker up there?"

"Oh, no, sir," was the complacent response. "She's been to look at the little chap oftener than any one else, I think; though always with a light veil on, just as you saw her—you and the lady here."

"Ab, seems to take quite an interest in Jemmy, eh?"

"It looks like it, sir."

"Quite a young lady, I should say, and a pronounced blonde?"

"Her neck sort o' showed white, sir, what you could see of it," with a smile. "An' she do have a trim, purty figure of her own, though summat undersized. However, some likes the long 'uns, an' others likes the short 'uns. God bless 'em!" with a rudely complimentary smile for Mrs. Musgrave, who promptly and becomingly frowned in response.

"Come, Mainecastle!" she said, a little imperatively.

"One moment more, ma'm," pleadingly; and, upon his murmuring:

"This is really more important than may appear to you."

She acquiesced in remaining, though with but an angry patience.

"Isn't the young lady staying rather over-long up there with the patient alone?" inquired Castlemaine, turning again to the orderly.

"Not so long as you folks did," was the rather surly reply; for the man's self-sufficiency was not pleased at the pretty widow's black look for his awkward forwardness. "However, she may have gone down and out by the other way. I reckon I'll go back and see."

"What! there was yet another exit, then?"

"Of course, connecting with the back street," and the orderly was already on his way back up the stairs.

"Why should you return, too?" exclaimed Mrs. Musgrave, not a little pettishly, as her companion made a movement to follow. "Surely we have learned enough."

"Not quite, ma'm; you see, I caught a sort of half-glimpse of that young woman's face, and—"

He was interrupted by a series of shouts from the orderly above, so loud and terrible that not only both the widow and he, but also two or three of the men-nurses who chanced to be near at hand, went hurrying pell-mell up the steps.

A frightful and most unexpected spectacle presented itself.

Half-supported by the horrified attendant, and leaning against that last revealing sketch upon the wall—newly marred and obliterated by a hurried hand, it appeared—was the poor patient, Jemmy, white as a sheet, horror-eyed, and pressing both hands convulsively to his breast where the life-blood was spurting from a fresh wound, in which the dagger that had caused it was still sticking driven to the hilt.

A small, open door near at hand showed a staircase landing beyond, doubtless "the other way down and out."

"A doctor, quick!" cried the orderly. "And some of you out and after that last visitor, the veiled young woman!" with a gesture toward the small door. "She must have done this—there was no one else here with him!"

Mrs. Musgrave had given a little scream, and,

but for her servant's support, she would perhaps have fainted away.

A surgeon and other attendants were speedily on hand—they would naturally meet such an emergency with expedition in a hospital—while, the alarm having spread, a dozen or more men had raced through the door and down the narrow stairs in pursuit of the alleged murderer.

All of no avail! The blow had been home-deep and mortal, the poor victim expiring almost immediately, and without saying a word, and the pursuers of his assassin presently returned, completely baffled, with the report that she had disappeared amid the thronging crowds of the great city, leaving not a trace behind.

Castlemaine merely waited for his mistress to somewhat recover herself, and then hurried up, with others, to examine the fatal knife as it was withdrawn from the wound.

It was a strong, short-bladed dagger, provided with a horn hilt, somewhat worn, and apparently without a single distinguishing mark by which its ownership might be traced.

He then hurriedly conducted Mrs. Musgrave to her carriage.

"You need not ride outside, Mainecastle," said the lady, faintly. "Step in here with me. I—I feel dreadfully shocked."

The detective obeyed, and they were driven rapidly away.

"I hope I shall not be mixed up with the dreadful affair," observed Mrs. Musgrave, with much nervousness of manner. "You didn't give that policeman or any one else my address, I hope, Mainecastle?"

"By no means, ma'm," was the respectfully gentle reply. "Not I! And I was careful to hurry you away before any one could give you a thought. Nothing to apprehend at all, ma'm. Do try to compose yourself!"

"I am trying, Mainecastle; but it was so unexpected, so appalling!"

"I know, I know, ma'm. You are looking very ill. Sha'n't I order your driver to proceed to some restaurant, where I can procure you a glass of wine?"

"Oh, if you kindly will, Mainecastle! Are we far from Delmonico's?"

"No, ma'm; only a few blocks away by this time." And he gave the order accordingly.

After the glass of wine, Mrs. Musgrave felt so much restored that they resumed their homeward drive with no further delay.

"Mainecastle!" Mrs. Musgrave at last said, after a long and troubled silence.

"Yes, ma'm?"

"You—you thought you recognized that dreadful young woman?"

"I know that I did now, ma'm." And the detective's brows were darkly knitted.

"And that was the reason you questioned the orderly so closely and wished to follow him up the steps?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"I should not have prevented you!" regretfully.

"How were you to know different, ma'm, when I was uncertain myself? Besides, a minute or two sooner could doubtless have availed nothing."

"Who was it, Mainecastle? Surely not the same as—as—"

"You mean as was in the portrait the poor boy drew into your sketch, ma'm?"

"Yes."

"No, ma'm; a different young woman altogether. That is—" And he again knitted his brows thoughtfully without completing what he had been about to add.

"Who was it, then, my friend?"

"Justine Parret, Mrs. Delamour's maid, ma'm."

"Oh, dear me! how dreadfully mysterious and horrible this all is!"

"Very, ma'm; one can't but admit it."

"But such a cold-blooded murder! what could have been the motive—what could she have had against that poor weak boy?"

"How should I know, ma'm? But I'll find out in devilish short order, or—beg pardon for the improper word, ma'm!"

"Never mind that."

"Still, ma'm, speaking of motives, she might have also recognized the murderer in the boy's picture, same as we."

Mrs. Musgrave turned to him with a newly awed look in her pretty face.

"You recognized that, too?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'm."

"As Sally Brown, my former maid?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Good heavens! it is simply terrible. However, I had always more or less distrusted that girl, with her Gypsy swarthiness and Gypsy eyes; though of course, I could never have deemed her capable of such horrible and desperate crime. Clarence Rorston's murderer!"

"Yes, ma'm; no doubt of it any longer; mystery's ended."

"I am afraid, Mainecastle, you have had a good-deal more important detective experience than you were willing to credit yourself with to me."

"Mrs. Musgrave, it is true," replied the detective, frankly. "Still, I have not deliberately deceived you, but only held something back.

You will not blame me one bit, I give you my word, when you come to know all."

"All in your own good time, then, my friend. Now tell me again: you think Justine may have also recognized the picture of Sally, and consequently what we had, therefore, learned from reviving the poor boy's memory?"

"I suggested that she had most likely done so, ma'm."

"And that, you think, would furnish her with the incentive for obliterating the sketch and taking the sketcher's life?"

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### WATCHING AND WAITING.

"WELL, yes, ma'm," replied the detective, thoughtfully. "You see, the two young women might have grown intimately fond of each other, the one being your own maid, and the other's mistress your guest at your Newport villa, at the same time?"

"Well, and then?"

"And then—with Justine having the capacity for this last dreadful act in her composition—something I, for one, would surely have never deemed possible—her incentive would have been to shield her friend from betrayal to justice, and to wreak a revenge upon the poor little cigarette-idiot for his unconscious part in it."

"Ah, indeed?" a little satirically.

Castlemaine looked up to perceive that she was quietly guying him—or as far as might be to be consistent with her mental distress.

"But wouldn't it now, ma'm?" he asked, a little ruefully.

"Well, hardly, Mainecastle."

"And why not, ma'm, if you will be so kind?"

"Because Justine and Sally Brown were never at my Newport house together, and if they have ever met each other at all, it must have been quite recently."

"Ah, ma'm, how stupid of me! But who was Mrs. Delamour's maid at the time she was your guest, ma'm, if you please?"

"Herself, I suppose," a little disdainfully. "In other words, she didn't have any. In fact, so long as I have known her, Pauline Delamour has never been able to indulge in a lady's maid until she began to borrow from me the money I was silly enough to lend her, and which I am resignedly certain I shall never see the color of again."

"Then you think it possible, ma'm, that Justine and Sally have never known each other at all?"

"I think it not only possible, but highly probable."

Momentarily forgetful of her presence, Castlemaine stretched out his legs, with his chin on his breast, thrust his hands deep into his trousers-pockets, and gave utterance to a long, low whistle of complete surprise.

Indeed, a light was beginning to break in upon him so startling, so little anticipated, or theretofore even dreamed of, that he could scarcely credit it himself.

Mrs. Musgrave's amused laugh—and it was really good to hear her utter it again after what had chanced—recalled him to a sense of his surroundings, and he was very contrite in his apologies.

"You needn't mind," said Mrs. Musgrave; "for, if you are still my man-servant, you are none the less my brother detective in this new case, no less than in the old."

"I am glad to hear you say that, ma'm," replied the detective.

"And why, pray?"

"Well, I—I rather like to be a brother detective to a woman like you, ma'm."

"You emphasize the wrong word, do you not?"

"Oh, no, ma'm."

"What! wouldn't you like to be simply my brother, now?"

"Most decidedly not, ma'm!" looking steadily at her; "for that would prevent me being what I am—your servant, and slave, too, should you never forbid it."

Then Mrs. Musgrave, with a slight change of color, looked interestedly out of the coach-window, for it is not to be denied that it is somewhat a tedious drive from down-town New York to far upper Fifth avenue, Harlem.

"Now that we know this dreadful secret, Mainecastle," Mrs. Musgrave at length said, quite abruptly, "what are we to do with it?"

"Nothing, at present," was the quiet reply.

"Let us watch and wait."

"And say nothing of our secret discovery meantime?"

"Not unless our criminal, Sally Brown, should show up."

"Show up, indeed! The blood-stained Gypsy little wretch! if we could only track her down, or give the regular detectives a clew."

"We'll be regular detectives enough for her, ma'm. All we've got to do at present is to watch and wait."

"But for how long, think you?"

"For not longer than a week," replied Castlemaine, remembering his provisional promise of that morning to the inspector.

"Ah, well, then!" with a little sigh. "But I am satisfied, Mainecastle, that you have all along known as much about this case as any one can know—that, in other words, you have not told me all your past history, or anything like it."

"Madam, it is perfectly true," replied the detective, earnestly. "But it has all been in the public interest, and especially for your own protection and good. Still, that I have deceived you at all is unpardonable. You should discharge me from your service forthwith—even when I have barely just entered it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort! And, pray, why should you have interested yourself especially for my protection and good?"

"Because"—he looked at her so earnestly and wistfully that she drooped her own eyes, as though unable to bear his searching gaze—"But oh, madam, I dare not answer that question now."

"Here we are at last!" cried Mrs. Musgrave, a little bustlingly, and abruptly. "Dear me! and I shall barely have time to dress for dinner—that is, if I can think of eating, after our shocking experience of this afternoon."

But the pretty widow was one of those thoroughly robust and well fed little bodies who must have even more shocking experiences than she had that day undergone to wholly lose their appetite for a good dinner.

She dined fairly well that evening, at all events, if all alone, with only her newly acquired "Mainecastle" to wait upon her—a task in which he acquitted himself most admirably.

"It's quite an agreeable novelty, this having a man-servant," thought Mrs. Musgrave to herself. "Hilda is just nowhere as a table attendant compared with this gem—the only trouble is that one would feel more comfortable eating with him than under his menial ministrations. Ah, well! I suppose it will all come out right."

"Mainecastle," she said at last, when rising from the table, "you're to eat your dinner alone right here after me. After that Bridget will show you to the room you are to occupy."

"Thank you, kindly, ma'm; but it will be more my place to eat with the other servants."

"You are to do just as I command!" peremptorily. "Will you do so, or not?"

"I'm wholly at your commands, ma'm."

Mrs. Musgrave then sailed out of the room a little grandly, and the detective, being fairly hungry, applied himself forthwith to the splendid repast and costly service before him; for the widow invariably treated herself without stint to the best procurable for love or money, and might be said for the most part to live in solitary state, like a self-pampered little queen; though she was free-handed outside of her own requirements, while her charities were large and numerous.

Four days passed away, during which the servant-detective had but little to do but devote himself exclusively to his domestic duties, while wondering when the Hartlieths were going to spring their new plot upon Miss Blanton.

In the mean time, it seemed to him that his mistress was growing colder and more dictatorial to him every day. She was probably keeping his advice of letting the detective business remain dormant, on the watching and waiting line of action, in her own way. He, however, smiled to himself, and waited, while the fact that Hilda, the Swedish maid—a rather comely young person, was rapidly falling in love with him, or making believe to do so, and the cook was also becoming his especially good friend in a purely platonic sense, did not disturb him greatly.

"I must be careful not to get the big head," he philosophized with himself, "though this new service beats out even the Blanton establishment all hollow."

However, revelations, looking toward a break in this monotonously comfortable existence, were preparing.

Soon after breakfast, on the fifth day, he met Hilda in a passage, with red eyes, as indicating that she might have been having an unpleasant time with her mistress. Indeed, on seeing that the man-servant was about passing without giving her any special notice, the young woman managed a fine burst of tears, as a delicate reminder to him of her continued existence.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked the detective, with very circumspect sympathy. "Has your mistress been scolding you, perhaps?"

"She has been abusing me, Mr. Mainecastle," was the sobbed reply, "and all on your account!"

"On my account?" repeated he. "There must be some mistake."

"Oh, no, no! none at all."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I suppose she wants you for herself!"

"Look here, young woman!" said Castlemaine, angrily, "I won't have you speak of Mrs. Musgrave in that way. Tell me what this means, instantly."

"Well, she—she—don't be angry, sir!—she accuses me of letting you make love to me!" with a fresh lachrymal cataract.

"But this can't be!" cried the detective. "With or without your letting me, I never have made love to you, and you know it. What the

deuce! And what is more to the point, I never intend to."

Here the weeping girl bowed herself with a crushed air, and ran away.

Then there was a light step on an adjoining stairs, and, to his no small embarrassment, Castlemaine found himself suddenly confronted by Mrs. Musgrave.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### MOVEMENT.

MRS. MUSGRAVE was very pale, though collected, and there was a half-furious tenderness, as it might be called, in her dark eyes that he had never seen there before.

"I shall make no pretense of not having overheard," she said, with suppressed passion, "though I did so unintentionally."

"Of course, you did, ma'm," Castlemaine hastened to say, with much earnestness. "Pray, don't mind, ma'm. The girl is a good deal of a fool."

"Granted; but I must mind, in simple justice to myself, Mainecastle," the lady went on. "Hilda lied. I have not accused her, as she said, of letting you make love to her. I have accused her of making love to you."

"Oh, ma'm!"

"Nonsense! Cook sees it, I see it, every one sees it!" with a sweeping gesture, as if inclusive of a non-existent multitude. "She just fairly throws herself at your head on all occasions, irrespective of time or place. Now, you must agree with me, Mainecastle, that this is entirely improper—altogether at variance with a well-conducted household." She was regarding him somewhat savagely.

"Certainly, ma'm," he humbly assented; "altogether improper—if—if it were really so, ma'm."

"It is so, I tell you! How dare you contradict me in this disrespectful, brazen manner, sir? What do you mean? Am I not mistress in my own house? This is outrageous!"

"What is, ma'm, please?" somewhat bewilderedly.

"This—this impropriety, sir!" she was now very angry, indeed; though, for all that, Castlemaine secretly thought he had never seen her so fascinatingly pretty before. "Yes, sir!" clinching her little hand. "How dare you, sir?"

"But, bless me, ma'm! what am I daring or doing? I don't know."

"Yes, you do! yes, you are! How dare you say that that hateful little washed-out blonde thing isn't making love to you—every day, every hour, constantly—when she is?"

"Good Lord, ma'm! have it so, then, if you must. But in that case, I'm very sorry, though I really don't see how I am to blame for it."

"Yes, you are! You must have given her some encouragement or—or, shameless hussy that she is, she could hardly make such a guy of herself."

"Stop right there, Mrs. Musgrave! If what you say has a shadow of truth to support it, if you really believe me capable of this unseemliness—"

"Well, sir?" as he hesitated.

"Then, ma'm," continued he, with much dignity, "and in spite of my profound gratitude for your noble generosity and confidence, it will be far better for you that I should quit your service without delay."

"As you please, sir!"

But as he silently turned away, with a submissive bow, she peremptorily called him back.

"Wait!" she cried, and there was something else now struggling with the anger in her troubled face; "I alter my mind. Yes," beating the carpet with her little foot, "I am not to be treated with this insolence, I can tell you! Ha!" flashing up afresh; "perhaps you forget that pistol you gave me. But I have not, if you have, sir. No, sir. And it is still loaded, and—and perhaps I shall not hesitate to protect myself with it on occasion, sir!"

Here was, truly, feminine capriciousness and inconsistency, not to say lunacy, with a vengeance, and quite beyond even Castlemaine's experience. He could only stare at her at first.

"Insolence! pistol!" he repeated.

"Yes, sir; you hired to me by the month, and for the month you shall remain. I shall hold you to your contract, sir, rigidly to your contract; essay to skulk out of it in this unmanly, brutal way, as you may."

Here the detective could not abstain from breaking into a laugh, though sorry for it directly afterward, since it served to make her angrier and more unreasonable than ever.

"Ah, ma'm, do not be so wroth with one who is so willing, so desirous to—to serve you!" he said, earnestly. "Of course, I remain, then, since it is your wish."

"Indeed, you will, and whether you choose to or not!" stamping her foot by this time. "I should hold you to your bargain, sir."

"At your good pleasure, ma'm."

"For shame, sir!"

"But why, ma'm?"

"This hypocrisy, this deception! You know that you are not a servant—not what you pretend to be—that you are really a gentleman!"

Castlemaine bowed his head without reply.

"Besides," she went on, "you would leave me, would you? Aha!"

"Only on your insistence, ma'm."

"Indeed! and then what would become of our—our detective partnership, which was going to accomplish such great things?"

"What, indeed, ma'm? Ah, believe me, that or any other partnership with you would be all the happiness I could ask or hope for."

"What do you mean by that, sir? Come, I want to know!"

"This!" and falling upon his knee, he seized her hand, pressing it to his lips; after which he hurried away, without seeing how red and white by turns and how humid-eyed he was leaving her.

Mrs. Musgrave composed herself, and then, stepping into her dressing-room, touched the bell for her maid.

"I overheard your words to Mr. Mainecastle," she said, abruptly, as soon as the girl appeared. "Don't be afraid that I am going to scold you again, Hilda. But what did you mean by saying to him that perhaps I wanted him for myself?"

"Oh, ma'm, just nothing at all!" stammered the girl.

"Humph! and supposing that you had guessed aright—that I did and do want him for myself. What then?"

"Oh, ma'm!" in astonishment; "in that case, I shouldn't pretend, shouldn't presume—"

"Of course, you shouldn't. Now are you going to be more careful and circumspect in the future?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, ma'm!"

"Then you are at liberty to forget my upbraiding. Go, now. But wait; you shall assist me at my toilet. I am going out."

A couple of hours later, Mrs. Musgrave, returning home from a brief visit, manifested much excitement and alarm.

"Come right in here with me, Castlemaine!" she exclaimed, leading the way into her reception room, where she hastily threw off her bonnet and cloak. "Such a time at the Blantons! And my poor niece nearly beside herself—that is, if she really is my niece? Oh, it is dreadful!"

"Just calm yourself and then tell me all about it, ma'm," said the detective, in his business-like way. "Here is your favorite chair, and here am I at your service. Now, perhaps I can guess what you have to say, and save you the trouble."

"Oh, dear no! you can't know any thing about this."

"Let me see. The second theft of Miss Blanton's unfortunate letters is beginning to show its evil fruit."

"Yes, yes; how could you know?"

"And the Hartlieths have at last exposed their game boldly."

"Yes, yes; that is, Mr. Hartlieth and Pauline Delamour.

"Who are man and wife, as they long have been."

"Bless me! is it possible? And yet why not? But you seem to know everything."

"And they have probably not hesitated to introduce Gypsy Sally to old Blanton as his nephew's widow, and with a child in her arms as the old gentleman's grand nephew and sole surviving blood-relative, with the hope that he shall be declared heir, to the extinction of the adopted daughter's claims."

Mrs. Musgrave opened her eyes very wide.

"Just exactly what has happened! Oh, Mainecastle, you must be a clairvoyant, a necromancer, a magician! But no matter; what are we to do?"

"In the first place, tell me one or two things. Have the serpents withdrawn themselves for the present, after making their first deposit of poison?"

"Yes; they are gone for the present."

"Jubilant, or depressed?"

"That depends."

"How did Mr. Blanton take their alleged revelations?"

"With fury and contempt at first; perhaps more thoughtfully later on."

"Is he gone, too?"

"Yes; poor Nelly is alone in her misery for the time being."

"All hinged on the contents of the stolen letters, of course."

"Yes."

"Now, ma'm, it is necessary for me to know the import of those letters myself."

"But I only half-know myself."

"Then send for Miss Blanton at once, that we may confer together. This is a necessary preliminary to our squelching the enemy."

Miss Blanton was accordingly sent for, Hilda being the messenger, and as soon as she saw the detective, her astounded words were quite as much of a surprise for Mrs. Musgrave as for herself.

"Henry—Mr. Castlemaine!" she exclaimed, starting back, with paling cheeks.

### CHAPTER XXXIV.

#### A CONFERENCE.

"HA!" cried the little widow; "not Mainecastle, but Castlemaine, then? Well, things are

growing charmingly muddled up, at all events."

Castlemaine had, as will be seen, made no further attempt to disguise his personality from Miss Blanton, and he now bowed to both ladies composedly.

"You doubtless think that I ought to be dead, ma'm?" he said, to Miss Blanton.

"Well, it certainly looks that way," she replied; "though I received your considerate note to the contrary."

"Let me tell you all about it."

And he did so accordingly, his auditors listening with dumb wonder to the details of his thrilling night in the Perthshire and what followed.

"So it was the poor nameless man who was killed there?" exclaimed Miss Blanton.

"And who was doubtless buried in my livery," he added, continuing: "And now, ladies, since you know about as much as I do, it behoves me to set to work in earnest with you for baffling and confusing this vile new plot of the Hartlieths, as thus far developed."

Nelly shook her head despondently.

"You must not despair, ma'm," said the detective, with encouraging heartiness. He had wholly dropped his submissive manner, and was speaking with them unreservedly as an equal—a change, it had to be confessed, that was most becoming to him. "There is no need whatever. But, Miss Blanton, you must perceive that, in order to act with the confidence of my words, I must know just what sort of a hand these adventurers are holding against you."

"What do you mean?" And she hung her head a little.

"I must know the import of those stolen letters, ma'm."

"He is right, my dear," interposed Mrs. Musgrave. "Besides, what is there now to withhold?—their secret is already out."

Thus urged, Miss Blanton finally disclosed her confession for the detective's edification, which was as follows:

"Miss Blanton had for years—or ever since her adoption by Mr. Blanton, six years previous, when she was sixteen years of age—been oppressed by a galling consciousness of the one unworthy, dishonest act of her otherwise blameless life. At that early and distressful period, when a friendless orphan work-girl, she had first made Clarence Rorston's acquaintance, and had believed and trusted in his professions of disinterested friendship. Her companion in adversity was Nelly Masters, a young girl of about her own age, and her first cousin on the maternal side. This was the young woman whom it was Mr. Blanton's desire to adopt, out of a close friendship for her father. But Nelly Masters had died suddenly, and then, at Rorston's urgent instigation, the surviving girl had palmed herself off upon the old gentleman as the object of his benevolence, and been adopted instead. Nelly had only consented to the conspiracy after long and painful conscientious opposition, and her correspondence with her tempter to the fraud, Rorston (who had long despaired of ever being his uncle's heir in his own right, and whose secret object in substituting a young girl who would hold her own thereafter solely on his sufferance, is sufficiently apparent,) in discussion of the matter, constituted the letters which he had ultimately got into his possession, and were now in the hands of the Hartlieths.

No wonder that Miss Blanton should now appreciate her exposure to the fullest extent, and feel crushed and shame-stricken over it.

"It wasn't for the money that I kept my guilty secret for so long. I declare it wasn't!" she sobbed. "No, no; of course it was nice to be rich and independent and all that. But Mr. Blanton had been so kind to me that I had come to love him as an own father. Rough and surly to all the rest of the world, he began to idolize me from the very first. Then my irresolution grew with my procrastination. He might have grown suddenly poor, and I would still have clung to him. But at the last I simply could not risk losing his esteem by making a clean breast of it. And then there was Tom, all the time falling deeper and deeper in love with him, and I being proudly held back from him, yet all the time feeling myself such a fraud—so unworthy of him in reality! And then Clarence's cold-blooded villainy declaring itself—I had managed to get the correspondence back into my hands, but he stole it out of my aunt's dressing-room, or some one else did for him, I am sure of it. Oh, dear! It was at the same time that I missed the case of pistols Tom had given me, as I described to you, Mr. Castlemaine."

She broke down completely toward the last, notwithstanding Mrs. Musgrave's arm was sympathetically around her and the detective interposed such comforting words as he could.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Musgrave; "then it was your pistols, my child, that I had found and briefly appropriated, before that thieving, murderous wretch, Sally Brown, robbed me of one of them, along with my diamonds, and like enough your correspondence, together with letters of my own, doubtless at Rorston's instigation, and at one fell swoop?"

"Yes, I suppose so," sobbed Nelly, who had already received certain intimations to this

effect. "Oh, that wicked girl! But who and what am I to call any other woman wicked? I, who have been so base and wicked myself in this long, systematic deception of the dearest, kindest, and best old man on earth! Oh, dear!"

"Come, you are taking altogether too black a view of it, my love," cooed the little widow, kissing her. "Besides, are you not still my niece, my own sister's daughter?—as, indeed, was poor Nelly Masters, too, for that matter; though I confess that for a few bewildered moments I began to have doubts of almost everything, past, present, and future. You must not take it so hard, my dear. Besides, I don't believe there's one young girl in a hundred but would have yielded to the temptation that you did."

"One in a thousand would be nearer the mark," put in the detective, cheerfully. "Come, ma'm, you must not give way to it. What! if you have come to love old De Wolfe Blanton so dearly, for all his snarling, crusty ways, do you think for a minute that he will let these adventurers foist this kicking, squalling little waif, from Heaven knows what obscurity, in your place in his heart? Don't think it, don't believe it!"

"That is it!" cried Mrs. Musgrave. "Either an illegitimate, I'll be bound, or, still worse, some spurious child, hired for this special trick!"

"Ah, but you must be in error, both of you," murmured Nelly, but looking up a little hopefully for all that. "The child must be the wicked young woman's own, I am sure, and did they not flaunt her marriage-certificate in poor Papa Blanton's face?"

"Doubtless a forgery, from what Mrs. Musgrave has told me," observed the detective. "A common enough, every-day fraud!"

"Indeed, yes!" cried Mrs. Musgrave; "and doubtless easily to be proved as such. What! did I not have both Rorston's boast and Sally's confession, made verbally to me there in Newport, to the same effect?"

"Ah, can this be really so, auntie?"

"Don't I tell it, my love?—yes, and will cheerfully swear to it before any court in the land. Besides, you should have seen old De Wolfe Blanton's face toward the last—when they were flaunting that greasy paper at him with one hand, so to speak, and the Gypsy hussy and her squaller with the other."

"Oh, auntie, what was it—how did poor Papa Blanton look? I was too crushed and bewildered to notice anything."

"Of course, you were. And look? Well, he seemed dazed and pained, to be sure, but if ever contempt, anger and supreme disgust were written in human face they were blended there in your 'Papa Blanton's' at that moment."

"And naturally enough," remarked Castlemaine. "But I hope you, ma'm, did not let the plotters suspect what we are so sure of?"

"I kept it in as well as I could, Mainecastle," replied Mrs. Musgrave, with a look at him while addressing him by the transposed name, "but I am afraid that I threw out a spiteful hint or two, not only with regard to Rorston's murder, but also as to the poor boy who was so heartlessly disposed of at the hospital."

The murder of Jemmy O'Goolerhan had not yet been traced by the authorities, and, as the mystery attendant thereon had been at once associated in the public mind with the previous murder of the fashionable blackmailer, the flagging interest in the original sensation had been revived accordingly.

"I hope you did not hint too much," said the detective, thoughtfully. "We must make perfectly sure, and give the plotters full length of rope meantime."

"Oh, I hope not," was the reply. "But I couldn't help letting them know a *little* what I thought of them, you know. There was that evening-up with the Delamour that I had to rub out, as you will remember, and if black Sally took much that I said, to herself, that was her own lookout."

"That dreadful young woman!" exclaimed Nelly, her resentment replacing her individual suffering for the time being. "But you only charged her with the theft of your diamonds, so far as I could make out in my mortification and bewilderment, auntie."

"And how coolly they all took it, the brazen trio! 'This is too ridiculous, ma'm,' Hartlieth said in reply, in his grand, lazy way. 'If my wife's sister, Mrs. Rorston, could have taken your jewels, ma'm, in disappearing from your employment—for which she doubtless had good and sufficient reasons of her own, which you ought to be well aware of'—and just here he gave me a look for which I could have knocked him down, had I been a man, big as he is—'why they ought to be traced to her without difficulty, and there would be an end to it.'"

"Ha!" said the detective. "And they will be traced in good time, we may be sure of that. But what could the man have meant by his insinuation, ma'm?"

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### PLOTTING AND COUNTERPLOTTING.

"Oh, don't particularize!" cried Miss Blanton, who had grown very red. "It isn't necessary, Aunt Janet."

"But I think differently just the same, my dear," said Mrs. Musgrave, very seriously. "And why should you care for an insinuation that was so preposterous as to defeat itself on the spot."

"Harlieth subsequently hinted broadly enough Mr. Mainecastle," she went on, in reply to the detective's interrogation, "that the girl—Mrs. Rorston, ha, ha, ha!—had been forced to fly my employment through being the victim at my permission, of certain secret and persecuting attentions—well, on the part of whom do you think? But you would never guess it in the world."

Miss Blanton had buried her indignant and blushing face in her hands.

"But I am mostly a pretty good guesser," replied the detective gravely. "Mr. Tom Rashon, most likely?"

"Exactly! Could anything have been so absurd?"

"Hardly; but then the flight had to be accounted for in some way, apart from the diamonds, of course."

"The idea of Tom having ever thrown away so much as a passing glance on that black thing!" exclaimed Nelly, looking up with flashing eyes. "Oh! I haven't a doubt that, if she killed the major—of which there now seems to be no shadow of doubt—that she was also that poor idiotic boy's assassin."

"No, my dear," and Mrs. Musgrave shook her head; "let us give even the devil her due. Mr. Mainecastle is quite sure that that wretch was the Delamour's maid, Justine."

"That is to be made yet surer, though," observed the detective, slowly. "Black Sally may have had a hand in the boy's death, too."

"What? how?" exclaimed the widow surprised. "But you recognized the hospital murderer as a blonde—even caught a glimpse of her face."

"True, true; but still—I shall continue to think the matter over. In the mean time, tell me, please: this Hartlieth, did they then make no secret of being man and wife in this scene of the morning?"

"None whatever. They had doubtless come prepared with the admission of the fact, as perhaps arguing a certain frankness and unconcealment on their part."

"Humph! Ladies, I shall now ask your leave to take my departure alone, for there is much to do that should be done promptly. That is," with his man-servant's obeisance to the widow and a half-smile under his mustache, "if you, ma'm, can kindly spare me from my domestic duties here?"

She laughed and flushed in a way that thrilled his secret pulses, inasmuch as it implied at least an indulgence for the semi-confession to which his emotions had prompted him some hours previous.

"So, Mainecastle!" she replied, with mock gravity; "but I was really thinking of having you sweep out the attic floor to-day, and perhaps putting the lumber-room in order. Still, I will give my consent, on condition of your telling us what you are going to do."

"Shall you keep together to-day, you two?" asked the detective, in a precautionary way. "It would be advisable, and if you should be together in Miss Blanton's home, so much the better. You might help me a bit there."

"Of course I sha'n't quit Nelly for the present, and as well be at her house as mine," replied Mrs. Musgrave, promptly. "But in what way might we help you out?"

"Well, if you could only manage—by message or in any way—to separate the Hartlieths from Sally and the baby, say at some specified time this afternoon!"

"Ah! but what do you intend as a first important step?"

"Can't you guess? To place the Brown girl under arrest forthwith, on both the diamond-theft and Rorston-murder charge. As a preliminary, I shall swear out a warrant without a moment's delay."

"Ha! you are for rushing things!"

"The time for prompt action is at hand. Can you manage what I suggest, do you think?"

"Let me think!" and the widow placed a dimpled forefinger to her pretty forehead, which she wrinkled thoughtfully. "It is ungrateful work enough to have to parley with such wretches, even in counterplotting them, but I might manage it with Pauline. If she is still painfully hard up, as is more than likely, she will hardly be averse to a prospective reconciliation. But then Hartlieth, with his elephantine cosmopolitanism, would be harder to manage. How would a message, just hinting the possibility of a willingness to compromise on Nelly's part, answer?"

Castlemaine nodded approvingly, but Miss Blanton was at once up in arms against the proposition, as might have been expected.

"Not to be thought of!" she cried, indignantly. "Aunt Janet, what can you take me for, by even hinting at such a thing?"

"But, my dear Nelly," said her aunt, consolingly, "it would be only a trick on our part, to expedite Mr. Castlemaine's plan."

"No difference! No more trickery or deception for me!"

"Not even in self-defense?"

"Not on any account."

"You would then leave a clear, uncontested field to these miscreants?"

"I shall be truthful and honest hereafter," with flushing cheeks, "even if it means beggary for me, or worse. That is what I mean, auntie."

"But it can't mean that, if you make a fight for it, my dear," the elder and more worldly woman continued to urge. "That girl was surely never married to Rorston, whomever else she might have been married to, and even the exploited infant is most likely spurious."

"Scarcely a doubt at all of it," put in Castlemaine. "And doubtless susceptible of easy enough proof on occasion."

"I sha'n't think of it!" continued Miss Blanton, immovably. "There! Spurious or genuine, plot or no plot, if it pleases Papa Blanton not to forgive me, to cast me off irrevocably, it will be not a jot or tittle more than I deserve, and I shall not complain."

Mrs. Musgrave, however, threw the detective a look, as much as to say, "It shall be managed somehow, never fear," and Castlemaine, after dropping the parting hint that it would be well if he should be able to pounce upon the alleged Mrs. Rorston alone with her charge in the Perthshire apartments at about five of the afternoon, rose to take his departure.

"Don't go until after luncheon, which should be announced in five minutes, Mr. Castlemaine," Mrs. Musgrave said, very sweetly. "You offered no objection to being my guest once before," she smiled, "nor should you now, I think, with consistency."

Then there was a bark and a scampering from without, and even Topsy put in an appearance, to rub familiarly against the detective's leg, as a further reminder of that memorable night to which her mistress alluded.

"Indeed, ma'm," stammered Castlemaine, "I—I—nothing could afford me greater pleasure than to accept, but—I simply cannot. Time already presses, and, as you have surmised, this must be a rushing day with me."

"May I expect you to dine with me, then?"

"Ah, madam, with the utmost gratification on my part, if I can only be back here on time. The pleasure, the high, undeserved honor you do me—"

"No more of that, please," and she held out her hand, with a significant look and little blush.

Then was Miss Blanton very much surprised, not to say wonderstruck, indeed; for, instead of merely pressing the plump, white little extended hand, Mr. Castlemaine did not hesitate to raise it to his lips, under her very eyes, and then hurry away, with something very lover-like in his face and eyes.

"Bless me, Aunt Janet, has it come to that?" exclaimed Nelly, as soon as the door had closed upon him.

"And why not?" answered Mrs. Musgrave, a little snappishly, and with an unnecessary bridling up under her blushes. "I hope you see nothing objectionable in it, my dear?"

"Oh, no, no, no! In fact, Tom says that Mr. Castlemaine is a splendid fellow, with a stainless reputation. Besides, his good-looks and good-breeding are alike undeniable; and if only a mere detective, and probably poor—"

"What has that got to do with it, I should like to know?" sharply. "Isn't Tom Rashton poor himself in all conscience, and yet have you ever thought to scorn him on that account?"

"Alas!" murmured poor Nelly, her eyes brimming over afresh; "he will have a good chance for having all the scorn on his side when he knows all."

"Nonsense!" cried the little widow; "don't you have more faith in your Tom than that? But, look you, my dear, no more of those tears! You are to come to lunch with me this instant; and after that I shall accompany you home; where you may have an opportunity to assist my powerful brain in some sharp work."

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

##### MRS. MUSGRAVE MANAGES IT.

AN hour or two later, when Mrs. Musgrave and her niece were together in the cozy library-room of the Blanton homestead, the latter said, with a very business-like air:

"Bring me your writing-materials, my dear Nelly. I must make my flanking attack on the enemy without further delay, if at all."

Miss Blanton complied with the request somewhat hesitatingly, and then said:

"Aunt Janet, you can't mean to write a message to those—those creatures, after what I said?"

"To Mrs. Delamour, certainly, my dear," replied Mrs. Musgrave, quietly, "but not upon the business, you may rest assured."

"On what, then, if you will permit me to inquire?"

"Oh, certainly; nothing secret about it. I told you of our little flare-up over that fresh loan of a thousand, which I declined to make her?"

"Yes."

"Well, now I'm simply going to say that she can have the amount—on security. That is all."

"Aunt Janet, you shall not do it!" passionately. "I just won't have you do it!"

"Hoighty-toighty, my dear!"

"You know that it is simply your excuse to fetch the woman away from her sister, in compliance with Mr. Castlemaine's suggestion."

"What irrelevant conclusions do you jump to, my love!"

"As for her security," disdainfully, "what can such a creature have but some house furniture and a few trumpery jewels, already, more than likely, mortgaged for more than their value?"

"My dear Nelly, you are no business woman."

"But I can't think of your throwing away another large sum on that wicked woman? You know how I always detested her!"

"There, my dear, that will do. Who have you here who can take a message for me?"

Nelly threw herself in an arm-chair half-desperately, but, nevertheless, rung for one of the housemaids.

As for Mrs. Musgrave, she quietly penned the following message:

"MY DEAR PAULINE:—

"How ridiculous for you and me to fall out, as we did the other day, about a matter of filthy lucre, at that!"

"Come and see me at once—only I shall have to ask you to bring your little Mr. Hartlieth along, to sign something or other in security for you. A mere formula, you know. Am at the Blantons."

"JANET"

Miss Blanton vouchsafed to merely glance at this, without any comment, when it was submitted to her inspection, and then Mary, the parlor-maid, was dispatched with it to the Perthshire forthwith.

"Mrs. Delamour's kindest regards, ma'm," the messenger reported on her return, "and says she will be most happy to be with you very shortly."

"Any one else there?" asked Miss Blanton's aunt, a little anxiously.

"Yes, ma'm; Mr. Hartlieth."

"Ah! no one else?"

"No, ma'm; but I heard a baby cryin' a bit in the back rooms somewhere."

"That will do, Mary; you were very prompt, and I shall not forget you for it."

"It will be splendid!" commented the widow, looking at her watch, when the girl had disappeared. "That will leave Black Sally behind, just as Castlemaine wished it to be. Where are you going, my dear?"

"You really don't suppose I shall remain here to confront those adventurers again?" exclaimed Nelly, who had summarily risen to quit the room.

"They are not here yet, are they?" said the widow, in a half-provoked tone. "Nelly, oblige me by resuming your seat, or I shall be seriously offended. You shouldn't forget, my dear," she continued, as her niece complied with a rather rebellious air, "that you have a rich aunt remaining to you, even if Papa Blanton should think of throwing you overboard, as you seem to apprehend so ridiculously."

"Always that!" replied the young lady, bitterly. "I suppose I am as capable of earning my own livelihood now as before Mr. Blanton made a useless and extravagant young woman of me."

"Tush, tush!"

"But you seem to think that money is just everything, Aunt Janet. And I am getting resigned now—after a fashion. I don't care any more for your money than for Papa Blanton's. It may be all the better for me, just as it threatens."

"Ah, indeed! how so?"

"Well, it would be something of a test for Tom, at all events."

"Fie, Nelly! to suspect that splendid, but rather harum-scarum, young fellow of mercenary motives."

"But I don't, really I don't!" replied Miss Blanton, with tears in her eyes. "But still I can't help knowing how fond of money most young men are, and the pleasure that is derived, almost solely from money—besides, he is yet to learn of the cowardly, contemptible figure I have been cutting here for the past five years in a dead girl's shoes!" wildly.

"Now, look here, not a word more of all this, or you and I will fall out, Nelly?" cried Mrs. Musgrave, peremptorily. "Talk to me about something else this instant. What, for instance, is the matter with Mary, your parlor maid? I remark that she is looking sad and out of sorts."

This change of the subject caused Nelly to liven up a little.

"Pining, I think and fear," she replied, with a half-smile.

"Pining?"

"Yes."

"But over what or whom?"

"Our whilom man-servant, Henry, who was crushed in the Perthshire elevator, you know," with something more than a half-smile this time.

The little widow threw up her hands with an expression of comical dismay.

"Mary, too!" she exclaimed. "Bless my stars and garters! What will not this man Castlemaine have to answer for, if he is to keep

up his man-servant characters. Why, there is my Hilda, who also might have been clean gone on him, as they say!"

"To say nothing at all of Hilda's mistress, I suppose?" suggested Miss Blanton, very demurely.

"Another such insinuation from you, Nelly, and I'll—I'll disinherit you!" cried Mrs. Musgrave, coloring furiously. "However," with real seriousness, "it really is no fault of Mr. Castlemaine's, I will say that for him. No one could have enacted his part with truer modesty and circumspection."

"That is certainly true," replied Nelly. "I suppose it's all in an unconscious way he has."

Then, the street door being heard to open, together with voices in the hall, she jumped up in unaffected embarrassment.

"Heavens, that must be Mary letting those wretches in, and I did not hear the bell ring. How shall I escape?"

"I did," observed Mrs. Musgrave, composedly, and seeming rather to enjoy her niece's dilemma. "And they are to be shown right in here, according to my whispered orders to Mary. Must you absent yourself from the interview, my dear?"

Nelly was looking around her wildly, as she could escape neither by the adjoining hall passage without being seen, nor into the next room, which was a small parlor, without wrestling with a pair of obdurate and creaky folding-doors.

"I'll manage it for you," said Mrs. Musgrave, rushing to her relief.

And then before Nelly could prevent her, and whether by malice prepense or not, she found herself hurried by her aunt into a small adjoining cabinet, and the glass door closed upon her, through which she would scarcely escape hearing every word of the prospective interview, without burying her head into the cushions of an old leather-covered lounge, which it contained, or holding her fingers industriously thrust into her ears.

She will be readily forgiven if she made the best of the hard bargain enforced upon her, by opening her ears, instead of closing them.

Mrs. Musgrave had just time to resume her seat and composed air at the table containing the open writing portfolio, when the visitors were ushered in.

"Ah, how good of you, Janet!" cried the Delamour, advancing with open arms.

"Don't mention it, my dear Pauline," and the little winow was already on her feet, arms wide, her face a garden of sweet, dear little smiles. "But you might have known that I could never treasure a tiff with you."

"Nor I with you. Ah!"

And then there was the embrace and the kiss of peace, which among society women is so often and often more of a hollow mockery than Judas's traitorous salute upon the Master's cheek.

"Heyday, this is something like!" was Mr. Severne Hartlieth's quizzical comment, as he slowly brought his extensive figure into a sitting posture, after his lazy, high-bred bow of greeting. "And how are we now, Mrs. Musgrave? I really hope Miss—that is, the young lady, you know—is feeling less harsh and hostile over the disagreeable family revelation that my wife and I felt forced upon us to make this morning."

"Oh, she'll get over it in time, no doubt," replied the widow, resignedly. "Of course, such things will happen, and, while no one can really blame you two for electing to stand by your own, as I may say, I am with her, doing my best, as opportunity offers, to make her view the thing in a philosophical light. Besides, as she is still my niece, she will still have me to fall back on, you know."

And then Mrs. Musgrave fanned her prettily flushed face, without the slightest amazement at her sterling mendacity, while Nelly, in the cabinet, could only turn pale and clinch her hands in helpless indignation.

"La, of course," observed the Delamour. "If you really knew how I felt for the young woman, Janet, all the time that—However, I said to Herbert on our way home that it wasn't anything like turning the poor thing out to starve, since I was sure that you would provide for her. Didn't I, dear?"

"Aw, yes—or something like it, you know," languidly assented, or half-assented, the giant, bringing his monocle to bear on his surroundings.

"But confess, Janet," continued the Delamour, "that you were a little startled to know so abruptly of Hartlieth and I having been married all these years—and on perfectly amiable terms, too, mind you, even when virtually living apart? Eh?"

"Indeed, I more than suspected something of the sort long ago, Pauline," replied the little widow, as smilingly ready with her white lie as with its predecessor. "Family considerations, I suppose?"

Pauline nodded mysteriously, while fussing a little in her chair, and with a weather-eye upon the portfolio.

"Family considerations be hanged!" interposed Severne-Hartlieth, with his good-natured drawl. "Are my connections never to get over-

my having married the handsomest woman in England—aw, present company, of course, excepted, though we happen not to be in England—suit my own taste, instead of theirs? It seems not. Aw! what a comfortable room, ma'm. The old high-cockalorum's library-den, I fancy?"

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

#### AGAINST TIME.

AND then Mr. Severne-Hartlieth also brought his single eye-glass to bear upon the open portfolio, even more suggestively than his wife had preceded him in the hint.

But it was not yet quite five o'clock, and Mrs. Musgrave was determined to keep the loan in abeyance until the detective should have had the full benefit of clear coast that she had promised to arrange for him in the Perthshire apartments at that hour.

"You must be feeling the need of a snack," said she, bustlingly touching the hand-bell before her. "I do, at all events, and I am privileged to make myself thoroughly at home here to-day."

She accordingly ordered wine and sandwiches when the servant appeared, and these were appetizingly forthcoming in short order.

"But look here, my dear lady," observed Hartlieth, lazily coming to time with the refreshments, though apparently not altogether at his ease, "what time does the high old—I mean the respected and respectable Mr. Blanton—usually put in his evening appearance, you know?"

"Seldom before six, I think, my dear Mr. Hartlieth," replied the widow, comfortably enough on her own part, though fighting against time, and determined to keep her visitors another half hour, if she had to sit down on them to that end, "and it is only just five. Another glass of wine, Pauline. It's as good Madeira as my own, which is saying a good deal. But that shouldn't make any difference with your remaining here, Mr. Hartlieth."

"Aw, but it might, you know, when we're to meet him here again at eight by appointment, you know."

"Oh, you are?" she looked up quickly. "But I didn't know that."

"Y-a-s; saw him again this morning directly after he left the house for down town. It—aw—might look a little odd for him to find us here now, you know." With yet another solid cast at the portfolio.

"And so unexpected on our part, too," struck in the Delamour, continuing the hint. "You see, my adored Janet, but your wholly unlooked-for little message—and Herbert chancing also to be present when it arrived—"

"Oh, dear, yes!" said Mrs. Musgrave, but still glass in hand and exasperatingly oblivious of the writing-desk's proximity to her elbow; "I had almost forgotten that. However, it's always pleasure first and business last with me. Mr. Hartlieth, here's one kind of these little sandwiches that you haven't tested yet with anchovies. Do try one. And Pauline, your glass is quite empty again."

She kept up the delay until quite certain that the half-hour was up, and then pretended to turn to the writing materials with nervous haste.

"Mr. Hartlieth," said she, with a laugh, "did Pauline tell you that you had got to—"

"Quite right, my dear madam," and the great fellow had wheeled his chair up to her side with smiling celerity. "Yes—aw—Polly said something about obliging her with a trifling accommodation, for which I might offer as her security in some way, you know."

"Just so," and, after producing her private check-book from her bosom, the widow, still smiling, began to write upon a broad sheet before her in a swift, business-like hand. "And there you are. Draw up to sign, Pauline, my dear."

"Why, hallo!" exclaimed Hartlieth, forgetting his eyeglass altogether and his eyes widening under the newly-lighted gas as they ran over the writing submitted to him. "By Jawve, you know!"

"What is the matter?" inquired the widow.

"A regular I. O. U., or note on demand, you know?"

"Of course—for Pauline to sign and you to indorse," naively. "A plague on chattel securities! I have no time or patience for them. A kind of an insult between friends, too. Your own indorsement is quite good enough for me, to say nothing of Polly's known integrity."

"Yes—aw—but this is for twenty-five hundred, and we—that is, Polly was only expecting a thou—"

"Certainly, certainly; which, with the fifteen hundred, she has owed me for some considerable time, makes up the amount. So here you are, my dears," unconcernedly filling out the check for a thousand under their eyes. "Your signatures now, without wasting time. How I do hate money matters!"

Hartlieth recovered his monocle, and, screwing it into its accustomed place, looked at her with positive admiration.

"By Jawve! but you seem to know how to

take care of yourself in 'em, anyway," he said, with his broad smile. "If Polly only had half as much—however, if a chap can't wade, he may swim, as my grandfather used to say, who was a British Lord High Admiral." And he forthwith motioned to his wife to affix her signature to the acknowledgment.

She had been taking in the unexpected situation with an odd expression in her face, which might be murderous suppressed rage or a profoundly mortified sense of being overreached in her own game, and was probably a combination of both.

"Must I?" she sweetly asked, daintily playing with the pen.

"Yes," replied her husband, with a gruffness altogether unusual with him—but what would the best natured of us do without some one or somebody to vent our occasional ill-humor on. "Go ahead. There's the place."

The little widow, who had proved pretty conclusively that she could be not less a business than an agreeable woman on occasion, took good care that the signature and its indorsement were in due form, and then her guests hurried away in some haste, if not in high dudgeon, as she had foreseen that they would.

That the ladies' parting kiss was less hypocritically cordial than their greeting salute goes without saying.

"Ah, my darling niece!" cried Mrs. Musgrave, triumphantly dragging Miss Blanton forth into the light, and embracing her; "but I didn't manage 'em nicely on my own account, besides obliging our detective friend? And I'm a gude bairgainer? as my Scottish ancestors might have said. Kiss me, my love!"

Nelly complied, after a fashion, notwithstanding that she was still not in the best of humors.

"I suppose you have been very clever, and all that, auntie," she replied, "in case it should prove that Hartlieth's indorsement of his wife's name is worth anything, which I very much doubt."

"Don't be alarmed on that score, my dear," beamingly. "I took some precautions, on general principles, the other day, to make certain inquiries of my lawyer, Mr. —, concerning the Severne-Hartlieth English connections."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and they are *bona-fide* and high-placed, who can be made to back his honorable indebtedness, notwithstanding that he has always been the family black sheep, and finally disgraced himself to the verge of social ostracism over there by his marriage with barmaid Polly, the daughter of old Gypsy Jock Heathman, the Hartlieth inn-keeper."

Here there was a ring, directly followed by voices in the hall.

"Ah, Papa Blanton!" exclaimed Nelly, catching her breath a little. "I wonder how he is going to receive me now."

"Yes, and some one else with him," whispered her aunt, kissing her encouragingly. "That voice. But don't blush and pale so outrageously, my dear. It is *only* Tom Rashton."

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### THE DETECTIVE'S RUSHING WORK.

To return to Castlemaine, on his way downtown to Headquarters on quitting his good lady friends at Mrs. Musgrave's house, he took in the Piccadilly Bachelor Apartments, and was so fortunate as to find Mr. O'Goolerhan, the janitor, with whom he wished to have a few words, standing lugubriously at the entrance.

Indeed, the little old gentleman was in bad case, as he had been ever since the death of his "talented" but decidedly eccentric son, and was, in fact, so changed that the detective hardly knew him, though this was by no means his first meeting with him since that tragic event.

"I hope you are finding yourself just a little more cheerful, Mr. O'Goolerhan," he said, taking the old man's hand most kindly.

It was as Mainecastle, Mrs. Musgrave's manservant, that the detective had latterly renewed the janitor's acquaintance, with the accompanying facial transformation, as a general precautionary measure.

Mr. O'Goolerhan shook his head sadly, and looked up at the detective with his beady little eyes, red and watery now, and perhaps never to regain their wonted Celtic snap and fire.

"Weel enough, sor," he replied, "weel enough considerin' your kind lady's goodness to me. But that isn't much, sor. The b'y was so swate, so talinted, ye see, sor, an' it was the devil's own wake we made over him, such as any father moight have been proud of under ordinary circumstances. But—" and Mr. O'Goolerhan could only shake his head dismally once more.

"What's that in your hand?" asked the detective, curiously noting something that the old man was mechanically winding and unwinding about his fingers, while occasionally pausing to look at it with a half-vacant stare.

The answer was no less unexpected than startling.

"It's a lock of hair of the murtherers of me Jemmy, sor," was the reply.

"What! let me look at it." Mr. O'Goolerhan

permitted him to examine it. "How do you know what you say? And where did you get this lock of blonde hair?"

"None know or suspect me possision of it but yourself, sor!" said Mr. O'Goolerhan in a hoarse, mysterious whisper.

"Where and how did you get it, I ask you?"

"It was caught on wan of the poor b'y's coat-buttons, sor, an' escaped the attintion of every one but myself. It was while they was a-layin' of him out at the undertaker's, in his shroud, sor, an' whin Oi was kerryin' his poor gairments home wid me. Yes, sor," with a sudden flash, "there it is—from the hid of the mysterious she-devil as must have caught it on the button in some way. Och! is she niver to hang for me poor b'y's cruel death, sor?"

"I hope so. But this is very curious. Here, my friend, take back the tress and treasure it." Then a sudden thought occurred to the detective of a way in which the old fellow might be of use to him. "This wicked creature, who so foully murdered your Jemmy," he continued, "would you assist in tracking her down?"

"W'u'd I, sor? Whoop!" and, with a jump and a flourish, Patrick O'Goolerhan was for a moment at least his old fiery self again. "Bedad! but Oi w'u'd, sor, if Oi had to track her doon tro' the whole British navy an' army to the very fu't of Quane Victoria herself, bad luck to her!"

"Hardly any need of that, Patrick. In fact, I have serious doubts as to the Queen of England having any connection whatever with poor Jemmy's murderer. But, look you, my man, I know of a young woman up in Harlem who has hair to match that tress to perfection. If you might only get off duty here for a few hours."

"But that Oi can, sur. Oi've an assistant now, since me family throubles came on me. Quick, sor! the name of the b'aste, that Oi may swoop doon on her loike an avylanche, and hang her, shquirmin' an' twistin', to the foorst three in Cintral Par-rk!"

"No, no; that will hardly do. You must not forget that there are probably dozens of young women in New York with hair that would match that tress. It's only a suspicion that I give you scent of. But you might watch for me, keep guard over the house in which she lives, until I can investigate more thoroughly."

Mr. O'Goolerhan was scarcely less eager for this duty, and Castlemaine began giving him his instructions accordingly.

"But air ye yourself, sor?" inquired the janitor at last. "Sure, it's a power of interest that your lady mistress is takin' in the affair."

"If you'll keep my secret, I will tell you. I am a detective policeman in disguise; and you may well say that Mrs. Musgrave is taking a powerful interest in pursuing your boy's murderer. She is making it for my interest to hunt the she-fiend down."

The janitor was now more eager than ever, and was accordingly dispatched up-town forthwith, to spy over the Perthshire entrance-door, with parting injunctions as to circumspection and secrecy.

"There," thought the detective, on resuming his way to Headquarters, "Justine will be under watch and ward no less than Black Sally. And if I fail to find the latter, with her baby, later on, I shall most probably find the blonde maid in her place, which may prove next to the best thing."

"You're bringing things to a head," observed the inspector, on receiving the detective's customary report. "When shall you make your big sweep?"

"To-night."

"Good! Call upon the regular force up yonder for such assistance as you may require. I hope you can let me know by midnight that this complicated case is triumphantly closed."

"I hope to do that, inspector."

There being still plenty of time at his disposal, Castlemaine next proceeded to the political club where Mr. Blanton was in the habit of spending his week-day afternoons with clock-work regularity.

Though he had said nothing of his intention to Mrs. Musgrave or her niece, one of his down-town objects for that afternoon was to see and talk with Nelly's adoptive father upon the plot that was being made for her overthrow in his house and heart.

As he was about entering the club, however, he received a hearty slap on the shoulder, and turned to be accosted by Tom Rashton.

"Your hand, old fellow!" cried the gay young man, jubilantly. "If you've an hour to spare, you shall come to see me knock the spots out of—the Boston Amateur champion, at billiards for a hundred-dollar purse. Come along; it's for half-past three."

"Can't possibly, my boy," replied Castlemaine, smiling. "Other and pressing business. Am going to see Mr. Blanton. Is he in the club, think you?"

"I know he is. What is it?—about Nelly's exposure, and all that?"

"Yes; but what can you know about it?"

"Everything. Have just been told everything by Mr. Blanton himself, who sent for me for that purpose. And I'm to dine with him this evening."

"Good! This is, indeed, splendid; for I perceive by your high spirits that his heart is still steadfast and true for the young lady's interests."

"No; not for her continued heirship, at all events, I think. There you are out. But I say, Castlemaine," with another slap on the shoulder, "De Wolfe Blanton is just the rummiest, odddest, queerest, best, meanest, most incomprehensible old money-bag on this island, and don't you forget it."

Castlemaine could only stare.

"Yes," continued Tom, with no abatement in his rollicking liveliness, "the old cock will forgive Nelly the deception and all that, but there won't be a stiver for her. He says so, and most likely means it, too."

"But you seem to be uncommonly good-humored over it. I should think that you would feel just the reverse."

"What! eh? Why, don't you see that it let's me have a full swing at Nelly forthwith? No prospective millions in the road, or anything of the sort. Equally poor, loving and happy. See?"

"Oho!" observed the detective, who began to perceive that Miss Blanton's happy-go-lucky lover's heart was in the right place, and quite superlatively so at that.

"And the old gentleman!" Tom rattled on; "there's where his queerness comes in. You know, perhaps, that he hasn't been quite so bearish to me since that burglary affair?"

"I believe so."

"Well, he seems to positively like me now that Nelly is to be without a groat of her own. And—well, who do you think has put up the stuff for me in this match with the Hub champion?"

"Not Mr. Blanton himself?"

"And no one else! Ha, ha, ha! was there ever the like? You can't come along and see me wax the duffer, then? So long!" And Tom Rashton hurried away.

#### CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. DE WOLFE BLANTON.

"THERE'S a lover in a hundred for you!" thought Castlemaine, as he turned into the club-entrance. "However, he may be less enthusiastic over marrying a penniless girl with the sober second thought. But let me see: would it make any great difference to me if Janet Musgrave were poor, instead of rich? I don't believe it would, if she might only have me."

Mr. Blanton stared not a little curiously out of his shrewd old eyes as the detective, with no attempt whatever at facial or expressional disguise, introduced himself to him in one of the private reception rooms, a few minutes later.

He was a heavy-set, strong-featured, bushy-eyed old man of seventy, with a rather harsh, disagreeable expression—so often typical of your representative self-made man, whose chief or sole worship is so apt to be for his creator, namely himself—which was more or less belied, however, by a suspicious twinkle, which might be of secret kindness, in his searching gray eyes.

In fact, the rich Harlem property-owner, Mr. De Wolfe Blanton, had long been a standing puzzle to his acquaintances—friends, in the strict sense of the word, he had few or none—hostile and fearing and indifferent alike.

Known variously, behind his back, as "Crusty Blanton," "Hard-Bargain Blanton," and the like, he had yet been known to perform spasmodic, even crazily liberal acts and charities, in the estimation of his political and other associates. While reputed with no little reason with habitually carrying an aldermanship or assemblyman's place in his pocket, as the political emergency might require, he was never known to have supplied either with other than a worthy, upright and deserving man. He religiously minded his own business, never carped or bickered except with regard to the taxes, and was even suspected of doing that more as a self-pleasing joke than anything else; didn't owe a dollar, was equally conscientious that no man should owe him many of them; never said evil of any man save to his face; would have attended a President's reception or jumped into a caved-in street trench, with sleeves rolled up, to help drag out an injured laborer with the same disengaged, matter-of-fact confidence in himself; and yet was still in the general estimation—a bear, a miser, the soulless money-bag, and Crusty De Wolfe Blanton to the end.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Blanton, after inspecting his visitor's card. "'Guy Castlemaine, Detective,' eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Young man, haven't I met you somewhere before, and pretty often, at that?"

"Yes, sir; in the capacity of your man-servant, not so very long ago."

"Eh? what? the deuce! but you ought to be the man who was smashed to death in the Perthshire elevator."

"But I wasn't for all that, sir." And then the detective related his entire experience from the very first.

The narrative appeared to cause the old gentleman quite as much troubled concern as amazement.

"All very wonderful, no doubt," he commented at last, sternly knitting his bushy brows, and speaking as if to himself, aloud. "I hate detective work, secrecy, deception, masquerading, and everything of the sort! Eh, you hear me, sir? I say I hate it!"

"It is my profession, sir—that is, honest detective work is my profession, and I am not ashamed of it," replied the detective, quietly. "I can readily hate prevailing crime that renders such work necessary—yes, indispensable to the well-being of society—but for that very reason the employment should be an honorable and dignified one."

"Humph! Like enough; just so. Well, sir, and how are you getting along with the knaves?"

"I am about prepared to wind 'em up, sir."

"Ha! a clean exposure, eh—arrests, solution of mysteries, conviction, and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Blanton."

"And why, sir," cried the old man, with sudden bitterness, "could you not have come to this point, without dragging my poor child, Nelly's, self-exposure into the accursed tangle? That is what I want to know. It was an outrage, sir—an outrage no less upon her than upon poor old me, sir! The devil burn me if it wasn't!"

"It had to come of itself, sir, and it did come," deprecatingly. "It was one of the minor exposures that had to show up along with the general sifting of the complication."

"Curse the minor exposure, sir!" suddenly roared out the old man, stamping on the floor with his heavy walking-stick. "To the devil with the complication!"

"With all my heart, sir!" replied Castlemaine, composedly. "Indeed, I am not sorry to find you in this frame of mind."

"What frame of mind, sir?" with a belligerent glare. "Who is in a frame of mind? What d'ye mean, sir?"

"I mean with regard to your—to Miss Blanton, with whose misfortune I deeply sympathize, sir."

"There ain't any Miss Blanton any more! If you mean that deceitful young minx up at my house—and how I had come to love the girl, too, heigh-ho!—she has no misfortune but of her own creation. An ingrate, a traitress, a little monster of deception, a—a—" He broke off by again pounding upon the floor, with a string of unintelligible expressions mumbled over to himself.

"Sir," the detective went on with imperturbable earnestness, "she does not know that I am to plead with you in her behalf. Please understand that at the outset. Indeed, I am pretty sure that she would not forgive my having undertaken the task could she know of my intention."

"Why the deuce do you undertake it, then?"

"That is my affair. And I want to say this to you, Mr. Blanton. Miss Blanton cares nothing for your money—"

"It's well she doesn't, for she'll never get another dollar of it! No, not a sixpence, by jingo!"

"Cares nothing for that, I was about to add, in comparison with her loss of your affection and esteem. This she apprehends with a remorse and mental distress that I have seldom seen equaled, sir."

"Ha! eh? humph! a likely thing, indeed, after five years' systematic, methodized deception!"

"She makes no attempt at self-defense, sir—seems to be altogether too crushed and self-humiliated for that. But think: you couldn't have adopted the other girl—her cousin, whose father had been your friend—even if you had wished to. She was dead. This young lady wronged no one—except yourself by the deception, which is admitted—by taking the dead girl's place."

"Poppycock, sir!"

"She had her friendlessness and poverty to plead for her—to lure her on."

"The stale excuse of every other pick-pocket and cut-purse in creation!"

"Even as it was, the temptation would doubtless have been held at bay, thrust aside—the devil been ordered to get behind her—but for the persuasive arts of the accomplished scoundrel, in the interest of whose alleged offspring you are now besought to fling her off forever."

"What, that corrupt hound of a nephew of mine, Rorston! However, humbug, sir, humbug!"

"And lastly, has she made no silent atonement to you for the weakness of that hour—for the deception she has practiced upon you? No love, no affection, no dutifulness, no womanly sweetness expended upon you, as a matter of course? Oh, no!"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" and, struggling to his feet, Mr. Blanton began to stomp around and pound with his cane in a species of frenzy, real or pretended. "How dare you? Do you know that I've probably got money enough to buy you up, body and soul, fifty-fold?"

"No, I don't!" shouted the detective, losing his temper at last, and too much exasperated at the old gentleman's seeming harshness to guess at what it might disguise, "and there isn't money enough in the world to do it! To—hades with you and your money, and your hardness of heart with the rest! Blast your purse-proud insolence!"

do you think that there's nothing in the world but money, money, money? Why don't you eat, drink and wear it, then? Good-morning, or, rather, afternoon to you, sir!"

And the irate detective was accordingly flinging himself out of the apartment when a voice which he could hardly recognize as Mr. Blanton's, it was so conciliating, called him back.

"Look here, young man," said the old gentleman, "don't get mad. You ought to leave that for me to do." And there was the old twinkle in the shrewd gray eyes, which might mean almost anything.

"You seem to have monopolized the privilege pretty thoroughly so far," growled Castlemaine.

"So you've transferred your domestic services to Mrs. Musgrave's household, it seems? Eh?"

"Yes—such as I make any pretensions to retaining."

"Fine woman, the gay widow; a regular society plunger, eh, Castlemaine?"

"I am not here to discuss Mrs. Musgrave with you, sir."

"Oh, the deuce! Well, since you, nevertheless, are here, let me make a proposition to you. Suppose you drop in at my house this evening, almost any time between eight and nine."

"What for, Mr. Blanton?"

"Well, you may have your case at a critical point by that time, and I am expecting certain parties there by appointment whom you may wish to meet—that particularly amiable and ultra-enviable couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hartlieth, among others, and doubtless with my deceased nephew's alleged widow and heir."

"Hallo!" said the detective. "Why, yes, and thank you, sir! You can count on my presence."

"By the way, do you know anything of that marriage-certificate which they exploited upon me this morning?"

"I know that it is a fraud!"

"Know it, or only suspect it?"

"Know it, sir!" decided. "My superior, Inspector Byrnes has, at my suggestion, telegraphed to the Rhode Island clergyman whose name is appended to the document, and received a sufficiently startling statement in response."

"Good, good! You will put in an appearance, then?"

"Yes, sir: with pleasure."

"But, look you, young man," with a return of the stern and adamantine frown, "not another word asking for mercy toward that deceitful minx, Nelly."

"Certainly not, sir; since you seem so firm in your unforgetfulness."

"Firm! I am as granite, sir!"

And Castlemaine accordingly took his departure.

#### CHAPTER XL.

CLOSING IN.

AFTER quitting Mr. Blanton at his club, the detective stopped at a District Telegraph long enough to dispatch a brief message to Mrs. Musgrave as to his appointment with Mr. Blanton, and his inability to dine with her at her own house in consequence, and then lost no time in hurrying up to Harlem.

On reaching that locality, his first precaution was to secure the exclusive services of a couple of policemen in plain clothes, who were duly placed at his disposal on his application at the office of the precinct in which the Perthshire Apartment House was situated.

After duly instructing them as to the nature of the required service, he dispatched one to keep watch over the Perthshire entrance from a neighboring corner, and then approached the building alone, assuming his facial transformation as he did so, and having a curious lookout to see what might have become of Mr. O'Goolerhan.

Angry voices proceeding from the inner vestibule, he entered there to find Schneider, the lonesome German janitor of the building, and Mr. O'Goolerhan engaged in an angry dispute.

Neither of them recognized him, by reason of the odd disguising twist he had given to his countenance, though at first the detective could scarcely refrain from a fit of laughter at the extraordinary appearance of the little old Irishman.

He had, in fact, been indulging in no little of a disguise on his own account.

His ordinarily decent coat had been exchanged for a long-tailed coat, many times too large for him, of the regulation Donnybrook Fair fashion, with its tail-ends fairly trailing on the ground, as if mutely challenging any one to tread on them. In place of his accustomed Derby hat, there was an enormous, towering and battered stove-pipe of the Saint Patrick's Day in the Morning variety, short clay pipe stuck in the band of it, and all, while his general air was a swaggering, strutting character too ludicrous to conceive of.

"What is the matter here?" demanded Castlemaine, authoritatively.

"Der Irishman is mad!" cried Schneider. "He has got von bit of unraveled tow-robe v'ot he swear ish un vooman's hair, and he dretton to broke mein het pegauze der Emperor of Sherny's mutter vas der daughter of der Queen Victoria of Inchland."

"Your Honor is bein' desayved intoirely," put in Mr. O'Goolerhan, with his side of the case. "The Dootchman is as mad as a Ballyhooleran billy-goat. He doesn't know human hair from himp, an' thried to make me think that Quane av England wasn't as Dootch as himself."

"This is apparently a very stupid quarrel," said Castlemaine, inwardly rejoicing that neither of them had recognized him—the one for the Castlemaine that he really was, the other for the whilom footman Henry who had formerly called so often at the Perthshire to visit Justine. "You, Mr. O'Goolerhan, will oblige me with a few words in private, I hope."

He beckoned, and the masquerading janitor of the Piccadilly accordingly followed him out of the building and out of sight around a street corner.

"Now, my man," he continued, resuming his natural expression, "be good enough to inform me what all this nonsense means."

"Howly shmoke!" exclaimed the little man; "eff it ain't the detective gindleman, Misther Castlemaine, what sint me here, may Oi ate me head!"

"Exactly, sir; but that isn't explaining this ridiculous transformation," with a gesture indicating the outlandish coat and antediluvian head-piece."

"Whist, sor!" said the O'Goolerhan, in a hoarse, mysterious whisper; "it's in dishguise or incognato that Oi am at prisen."

"I should say so! And where did you manage to procure this beautiful outfit, pray?"

"At me sickond cousin's brother-in-law's widdys, over beyant at her cottage on the rocks, your Honor. Sure, an' how am Oi to be a detective's assistant widout a fittin' dishguise? says Oi to meself. An' thin it shtruck me to reckylict that the widdys good mon had been kilt intoirely befoore he was buried lasht sphring, an' on makin' meself beknown to her, 'Widdy,' Oi says, says I, 'isn't it some o' Padly's Sunday gairmints ye moight shill be kapin' an' wapin' over at noights out of respect to his blissid memory, such as w'u'd furnish out a fittin' dishguise fur wan loike meself as is jist inferin' the detective thrade?' 'Oi have jist that same, Misther O'Goolerhan,' says she; and thbin, your Honor—"

"That will do. With how many drinks did you assist in disguising yourself on your way up-town, O'Goolerhan?"

"Divil a wan but foive or six, your Honor—long loife till ye!—an' nothin' shstronger at that but wather, diluted wid a little whisky."

"What did Schneider mean by your showing off some sort of sham for human hair?"

"Whist now, sor, it isn't yourself that Oi'd not be lettin' intil the little thbrick! Here it is." And O'Goolerhan produced, with a triumphant air, a strand of old raveled-out rope about a foot long and an inch in thickness.

"What on earth is that for?" inquired the detective.

"Och, sor, for to dishguise the gnuine tress of hair what me poor Jeminy's murtheress lift behoind her on the button of his coat! What else w'u'd it be for?"

"To hang a fool with, perhaps! Look here, how long have you been keeping this sort of thing up around the entrance of the Perthshire yonder?"

"If it's the saycret sERVICE your Honor put me on that your Honor's alludin' to," replied Mr. O'Goolerhan, with much dignity of manner, "Oi w'u'd reply that Oi wint on duty about thray hours ago."

"Who have you seen go in or out since then?"

"No wan but a lady and a gentleman, who wint out half an hour ago. The Dootchman said that the lady was Mrs. Delamour; an' Oi recognized the gentleman meself for the murtherin' big Britisher, Misther Hartlieth, what foost dishcovered the poor major's murthered remains."

"I hope your appearance didn't attract their suspicions or special notice."

"Oim sure yez may be aisy on that point, your Honor. The leddy, to be sure, Oi overheard ask the Dootchman who his comical little drunken fri'nd was, but she loike enough referred to some one in the strate."

"Ah, like enough! So no one else passed in or out in that time, eh?"

"No one but the Dootchman when he wint for the beer, your Honor."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, your Honor. The pail was bis, the money was mine, an' the beer was betwixt the pair of us. It was before we got into the political discooshin, sor."

Castlemaine looked at his watch and reflected. Not yet quite five, which ought to give him a clear coast with Black Sally for at least a half-hour, on the assumption that she had been left with her baby in the Delamour apartments. But then it would be simple madness to leave O'Goolerhan strutting and parading about the lower entrance, as there was no telling what

sort of blundering stupidity he might next commit.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him, by which both the Irishman and the German might be conveniently disposed of for the time being.

"Where did you get your beer?" he inquired.

"In the darlin'est little shibbeen your Honor iver clapped eyes on," was the ready answer. "It's joost around the furdest corner beyant."

"Here, Mr. O'Goolerhan," said the detective, passing him a couple of dollars. "Take Mr. Schneider there, and treat him and yourself to all the beer that the pair of you can hold. But you're not to say that either the money or the instructions came from me."

"What! is it a fule your Honor w'u'd take me for? Whoop!" and then this invaluable ornament to the 'saycret sERVICE' was off like a shot.

Castlemaine waited till he saw him quit the Perthshire entrance in the German's company, and then made his own way into the building, after exchanging a sign with the officer whom he had posted on the adjacent street-corner.

The plan which he had formed in his mind for renewing his acquaintance with Gypsy Sally, whom he fully expected to find alone with her baby in the Delamour apartments, was a very simple one.

Notwithstanding her Gypsy origin, and what he had discovered of the girl's absolute, conscienceless cruelty of disposition, on that terrible night of the elevator-shaft adventure, it was evident that she, no less than the Hartlieths, must be perfectly convinced that he, the detective Castlemaine, was dead—that they had killed him then and there, after penetrating his fictitious personality of the Blanton man-servant, Henry.

He would, therefore, suddenly disclose himself to her as suddenly risen from the dead.

Though the Gypsies play too much on the superstitions of others to have much superstition themselves, yet cruelty, so far as his experience had shown—especially the unique, laughing, absolutely soulless cruelty which she had manifested on that tragic occasion, even to the disgust of her older companions in crime, was never yet dissociated from cowardice in one form or another.

He would horrify her, if possible. That was his plan. Then, after forcing from her in this unguarded, defenseless condition, such confessions as he deemed important to his purpose, he would arrest her forthwith and hurry her away. Later on she could be brought to confront her fellow-conspirators at the Blantons, when he hoped to take in the Hartlieths at a final swoop, and thus bring the long and trying complication to a head.

As for Justine, the murdereress of the poor cigarette-fiend, what of her?

Well, our detective had by this time certain very distinct notions relative to both those remarkable characters, both Black Sally and Justine, which he hoped soon to make public in a way that would be somewhat unexpectedly sensational, to say the least.

Mounting the stairs, instead of ascending by way of the elevator, he was speedily at the door of the occupied apartments.

#### CHAPTER XLII.

##### JUSTINE AGAIN.

TAKING his way into the private hall, by means of a skeleton key, some movements in the rear rooms of the suite attracted him, and presently he heard a woman's voice humming over an air, probably to herself and over some work.

It was not the Brown woman's voice, but Justine's.

The detective's face took on a look of disappointment, and then quickly brightened, as if at a sudden recollection of something that had not yet had time to take permanent hold of his consciousness.

"Well," he said to himself, "why not in this form as in the other?"

With this rather enigmatical soliloquy, he waited a moment, and then, assuming his natural, or what may be called his Castlemaine-Henry expression, quietly opened the door, which proved to be unlocked, and entered.

It was the dining-room, and so quiet was his entrance that Justine, who was busy over some needlework, with her back partly toward him, was not at once aware of his presence.

Then he spoke her name, and she sprung to her feet, and, confronting him, recoiled with a stifled shriek.

No need to doubt her terror at his appearance, at all events, bold, bad, fearless, crime-stained as she might be in the abstract.

"You—you!" was all she could falter through her white, quivering lips, while retreating as far as an adjoining window-ledge would allow, her strained eyes all but starting out of her head, her hands extended shudderingly, palm outward, toward him, as if to keep off an appalling apparition from the tomb.

And then his next words, though spoken with equal quietness, were such as to somehow increase her panic indefinitely.

They were these: "So you are in your blonde form this time, not the other one? Well, my

dear, it is all one to me—as you ought to know, if you ever think or dream."

"Dream? dream?" she repeated aghast. "What can you know of that! Off, off! keep off from me, be you Henry or Castlemaine, be you from the living or from the dead!"

He folded his arms and laughed at her, in a weird, chuckling, Mephistophelian manner, that was well calculated to increase her bewilderment and terror indefinitely.

"Enough of this!" he said, with grim sternness, at last.

He stepped threateningly toward her, with a lithe, noiseless stride, and grasped her wrist, his handsome forehead darkening with fierce resolve and pitilessness.

He had cast off his hat, and his every lineament was expressive of a suppressed fury and merciless resentment such as doubtless even this woman had never faced in the experience of her own ruthless, desperate, fiendish past.

However, the clutch upon her wrist had relieved her of the supernatural element of her terror, such as it had been—for ghosts may appear, and gibber, and threaten, and warn, and even speak, but are scarcely credited with a genuine flesh-and-blood grip—and by this time, though still lamentably unstrung, the girl was not so absolutely helpless and resourceless in her fear as at the outset.

"Woman—fiend—she-devil! is it possible that you can dream, then, that you take up my chance-words so readily?" he hissed between his teeth, while still scorching her, as it were, with his terrible, menacing glare. "Why don't you dispose of me as you disposed of Rorston, of the poor idiot boy? Is there no weapon, no stolen pistol nor secret knife, ready to your bold, desperate hand?"

"No, no, no!" she stammered, reeling half to her knees near the low chair that she had been occupying; "not Rorston, not him. That was Sally, not I—for you must know all, and—"

"Peace, miscreant, monster, serpent, scotched in your hideous poison-trail at last!" he interrupted, with cold fury now. "What! would you hope to play your double part forever, at your fellow-confederates', your master-conspirators', bidding—as blonde Justine to-day, and Black Sally to-morrow? Wretch, your fate is at last upon you!"

"Mercy! mercy!" and as she crouched yet lower and more abjectly to the floor, he unconsciously relaxed his grasp on her wrist a little. "Mercy, mercy, Henri!" with something of the old caressing melodiousness in her pleading tones.

"Mercy, indeed!" exclaimed the detective, with redoubled relentless. "And you would also dare to address me by that old name, under which you doubtless once fancied that I really cared for you, when I was simply tracking your crimes, even your possibilities for crime, to their home in your false, black soul! That entreaty from such as you! Ha, ha, ha!" His laugh was a masculine echo of her own there at the edge of the gaping elevator-shaft abyss on that dreadful night, with his life hanging in the balance;—yes, just as eerily heartless and remorseless as hers had been then, only she was then in her Sally Brown, her swarthy Gypsy, personality, whose mystifying cheat was at last apparent to his long-baffled, long-hoodwinked penetration.

But she continued to sink and crouch lower and lower away from his detaining grasp, cringing down closer and closer to the carpet, with her head bowed, her face hidden, and to yet murmur:

"Mercy, mercy!"

"Fiend! dare you still ask it, and in that feeble parrot-tone?" he exclaimed. "What! had you mercy, on aught but your rippling, frivolous, gloating laugh, for me when I was being hurled by Hartlieth's giant strength into the dismal depths? Was there anything better for me from you when you with the others thought you gazed down on me, dead, crushed, mangled, in the cellar-pit? Mercy? Demoness?"

Here, in his indignation, he relinquished his grasp entirely, casting her violently, loathingly from him.

An all but fatal heedlessness.

She bad by this time secured the object of her ruse in cringing down so closely to the floor—a long, sharp-bladed pair of scissors, dropped with the needlework in her first panic—and was at that instant flying like a young tigress at his throat, with a hoarse, unnatural ferocious cry, or roar, the shears clutched dagger-wise, sharper blade foremost in her desperate hand, her eyes blazing like basilisks with the fierce, furious, hungering mania for his blood.

Castlemaine only saved himself by a fortunate, gliding leap to one side, the descending thrust just missing its plunge at his throat by a hair.

The next instant she was again in his athlete's grip, disarmed, the weapon twisted out of her clutch, once more at his mercy—or, rather, mercilessness; but still blazing, flushing, palpitating with her murderous hate, and writhing, struggling with a demoniac strength of which her graceful, petite frame would not for a moment have been deemed capable.

"Hell-cat!" exclaimed the detective with calm

remorselessness once more; "must I clap the nippers upon you, or put you to death forthwith? For, by heaven, I would have no more compunction in twisting your neck than a chicken's!"

He even seized her by the head and neck, with assumed fury and fierce force, as if about to put the threat in literal practice.

"No, no!" he muttered to himself; "the bullet were the deadlier, if the less painful way. So be it!"

With that, he once more hurled her from him, his revolver was in his hand in a single flashing movement, and then it was presented full at her defenseless woman's breast.

He had not miscalculated the effects of this sudden return to seemingly relentless ferociousness on his part.

#### CHAPTER XLII.

##### FEAR-BOUND.

ANOTHER change had come over the baffled and defeated little monster.

The detective had not erred in estimating fear, genuine, paralyzing, cowardly fear, as the natural accompaniment of the woman's inborn fiendish cruelty of nature, apart from her frenzied desperation and bloodthirstiness.

She had fallen back into the arm-chair that she had first occupied, and, with the certain death grinning at her from the remorselessly loaded pistol, her panic was now absolute, unrelied.

"For God's sake, Castlemaine, for God's sake!" was all she could gasp out at first—her face the hue of death, her quivering lips shrinking away from her white, glistening teeth, even her eyes losing their luster and fading back into a sort of agonized awefulness. "Ah, for God's sake! I am conquered, I will be your slave, confess what you will—yes, it is true, Sally Brown and I are one and the same—I stole Mrs. Musgrave's diamonds for Rorston—I killed him, too, in order to obtain them for my sister, and, moreover, he had injured me horribly in making me marry his former groom in secret, Jack Brown, the father of my child and now dead—yes, yes, and it was my hand, too, that struck down the boy in the hospital—I had recognized Mrs. Musgrave, but not yourself, and the revelation in that picture upon the ward wall, with my own face looking out from it, as Rorston's murderer, fairly maddened me—yes, yes, I confess all, what you will! Only don't shoot, don't, don't!"

But it was necessary that he should make sure of the permanence of this genuine terror that he had at last succeeded in striking deep into her bold, bad heart.

She must be fear-bound to the last extent of slavery at his merest beck, she must become the mere automaton of that deadly fear, of which he should hold the secret strings, pulling them and ordering her at his slightest caprice, before he could consent to relieve her of the physical horror that was at last upon her shrinking soul with such appalling weight.

"It won't do!" he shook his head relentlessly, and even advanced a step until the menacing revolver-muzzle was within an inch of her defenseless bosom. "Confessions, truly, but too late! Woman, you must die!"

She could see his outstretched, hooked forefinger already tightening in its pressure upon the hair-trigger—doubtless in another second the bullet would be in her heart.

In a second, the merest atom of time! Only that between her and extinction, and she so young, with her good looks, her youth, her revelling enjoyment of the mere consciousness of existence in this wicked but glorious and beautiful world!

Speechless at last, she tore open her dress at the neck with her fluttering hands, gasping for breath, the fear being upon her so appallingly that her reason itself might perhaps totter at any moment, and lapse into hopeless idiocy.

This would not do.

"Listen!" said the detective; "you are my slave now, on condition that I do not kill you on the spot. You are quite sure of that?"

"Yes, yes!" was the gasped reply; "only don't kill me now—not now! I swear to be your slave!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Oaths do not content me in this instance. I must have proofs—I must put you to the test."

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Rise from your seat"—he uncocked the pistol, returning it to his pocket, and calmly folded his arms, while thus commanding her—"go into yonder corner, then right-about, and down upon your knees in an attitude of prayer to me for your life!"

She had obeyed with white and trembling mechanicalness, and was there in the prayerful attitude just as he had commanded.

"That will do. Get up!"

She did so.

"Now"—his next command cannot be mentioned here, save to intimate that it was such as compliance with which could only be expected from a nature absolutely hypnotized with superlative fear, but for all that she started to obey it on the instant—"there, that will do. You can resume your seat."

She did so.

"Listen," he continued. "The Hartlieths will be back here presently, and you have been accustomed to obey them implicitly. But through what shall follow you are to obey me. You are simply to carry out your part for their contentment. In the mean time I shall be menacing you from wheresoever I chance to be in hiding about these rooms. At the first intimation to them of my concealed presence, my bullet will be in your heart. You understand?"

She nodded mechanically.

"Good! and I shall shadow you to the Blanton house when they take you back with them later on. You will be no less my slave in the open air than here now at this instant. You understand?" with a motion toward the pistol-pocket.

"Yes, yes, yes!" with a weak sort of wail. "For God's sake, Castlemaine!"

"It is well. Where shall I hide me, so as to overlook your obedience, when they first return? It must be an unique spot, whence I can secretly shift my position at pleasure, and be ready to spring out upon you, pistol in hand, at the first intimation of treason."

"Ah, for God's sake!—See, that long portiere-hanging," pointing to the narrow communicating passage. "You could manage it behind there with your cleverness." Her voice and manner were as mechanical as a sleep-walker's, and yet with their outward naturalness in good measure restored.

"That will do," he replied, after a brief inspection. "Where is the baby?"

She rose submissively, entered Mrs. Delatour's bedchamber, and then returned, holding a pillow upon which the infant was nestling, sound asleep.

"Yours, as you declared, and by Rorston's former groom?" he queried.

"Yes."

He questioned her yet further, and then ordered her to take the child away.

"They are coming!" he at last exclaimed, bending his ear to listen. "Now let me see you at your best, Justine, or—you will not forget?" with a significant gesture.

"No, no. For God's sake, Castlemaine!" And she opened the hangings obediently for him to step into the chosen concealment.

A moment later the Hartlieths entered the apartments, also by the dining-room.

Justine's conduct could not have been more gratifying to the jealous eye of the detective watching her and the others from the folds of the hangings.

"Bless me, girl!" exclaimed the Delamour, sinking into a chair. "Why are you not out of this blonde counterfeit and into your precious self? Don't you know that you are to accompany us again to-night, with your baby?"

"I shall have plenty of time Polly," replied Justine. "You know it never takes me long to make the change."

"Well, well; bring me some wine first. How is the young one? Herbert, you will have some wine, too?"

"No, I won't," drawled Hartlieth, who had discarded his hat and overcoat and seated himself with his accustomed deliberation. "I'm fairly stuffed with the Blanton sandwiches. However, you might set out the brandy, too, Sally." He was at the same time observing the girl curiously as she moved briskly but mechanically about in getting them what they wanted.

"What in—hades has come over you?" he at length exclaimed, with an oath, laying his heavy hand upon Justine's arm as she was setting down a dish of cold meat on the table at his elbow.

The girl turned upon him angrily, and yet without (as Castlemaine could observe) really breaking through the spell of mechanicalness that was upon her.

"Nothing!" she snapped out in reply. "And what do you mean, Herbert Hartlieth, in swearing at me. Am I your wedded wife's sister, or only her hired woman?"

"Tush, tush, Sally; Herbert couldn't have meant to offend you," interposed Pauline, conciliatingly. She had taken off her things, and was already seated at the wine and food. "Sit down here and eat with us, my dear. It is the dinner we must content ourselves with to-night, and you can attend to your toilette afterward."

"I'm not hungry, Polly," replied Justine, who, nevertheless, poured herself out and drank a glass of wine. "And now what are you staring at, pray?"

"Well—er—my dear," the Delamour had come to a pause in her eating and drinking, and was also observing her curiously, "there is something quite out of the way in your looks, I must say."

"Humph!" said Hartlieth, with a shrug of his immense shoulders, while mixing his brandy and water; "I should say there was."

Justine snatched a hand-mirror from the wall, and held it before her face.

#### CHAPTER XLIII.

##### THE SPELL HOLDS.

JUSTINE with difficulty refrained from a start of consternation.

There was, indeed a change in her face, as

revealed by the mirror. It wore a strained, hushed look, as if from some recent shock, but was composed, if, indeed, not a little overmuch composed.

"I see nothing amiss in me," she said, returning the glass to its place, with a forced laugh. "But I have been feeling somewhat out of sorts," she admitted, again busying herself about that and the adjoining room, "which may account for what you fancy you see wrong in me."

The detective in his ambush was content. The fear-spell was holding, and bravely, at that.

"It doesn't matter, Sally," observed Hartlieth, pushing back his plate and glass, and lighting a cigar, while Pauline seemed to have forgotten the incident, and continued her repast with a pre-occupied and somewhat troubled air. "Looked as if you might have seen a ghost or two; that was all. Where's the kid, my dear?"

"The child is asleep in Polly's room," corrected Justine, crossly.

Then, after a little while, she eyed them oddly, while arranging the glassware on the buffet betimes.

"Look here," she said, with a glance, half-fearsome, half as much as to say, "You see I am obediently doing my best; don't shoot," in the direction of Castlemaine's concealment, "is it all right over there at the Blantons?"

"Yes," Hartlieth ventured to answer, shortly, with his lazy nod from behind his lazier cigar-smoke; "it's all right. Better be getting yourself in shape, my dear."

"Bother that! I want to know if this is the last time I have got to go over there and face that music, which you may find more to your taste than I do."

"Yes, yes, Sally," the Delatour interposed again. "What has got into you this evening?"

"Nothing that I know of," responded the girl. "And you got the money we were so much in need of, I hope?"

The Delamour smoothed away the trouble in her face with a nod and a little laugh.

"Yes," she replied. "A cool thousand from the little Musgrave. It should keep us in trim till old Blanton comes to time with something for your little 'Adolphe Rorston.'"

The detective gave an inward groan. A thousand dollars from Mrs. Musgrave? And she to have submitted to the bleeding merely as a ruse for getting the coast clear for him, as she had promised. But the Delamour's next words, and what followed thereon, relieved him not a little.

"I suppose Janet must have thought herself intensely clever," she continued, with a newly-anxious look for her husband, "in making us give her that due-bill for the whole twenty-five hundred?"

"Begad! she was clever," replied Hartlieth, with his deep, reflective chuckle. "A stunning, a borny little woman! Ah, Polly, if you might only display half as much—"

"Enough! enough!" angrily. "You did me the honor of hinting that much, even in the woman's presence, you will perhaps remember."

"Ah, so I did; and with reason."

"You don't really mean to say that the bill gave her is worth anything, I hope?"

"It's face value—aw—every dollar of it, as good as cash gold."

Pauline was half-beside herself with mortification, for it was obvious enough that he was wholly in earnest.

"What!" she cried; "you would intimate, then, the odious little creature outwitted us, even while pretending to oblige us?"

"Just that, my dear," with another admiring chuckle. "A wonderful little trump card, the little Musgrave!"

Hartlieth trembled with vexation.

"Why, my signature isn't worth a shilling!" she exclaimed, with an air of triumphant conviction.

"Ah, but mine is," quietly. "My dear Polly, you mustn't forget that I have a family behind me, if you have not."

Here the baby was heard to give a restless cry, and Justine brought him in for Pauline to quiet, while she, with the remark that she was going to get herself ready, gathered together an armful of garments, and was heard to retire into a bath-room, that was just off the adjoining kitchen.

Then Hartlieth led the way through the communicating passage into the front drawing-room, which had also been lighted up by this time, and the Delamour followed with the child.

Castlemaine stealthily altered his concealed position, by stepping along behind the hangings, so as to partly command a view of both parlor and dining-room as occasion might demand.

Hartlieth looked at his watch and yawned weariedly.

"A full hour before we can think of starting over there again," he grumbled, slowly disposing his vast frame into an easy-chair at the center-table.

Polly, who had by this time hushed the infant back to its somnolence, eyed him with a sort of envy.

"Nothing ever seems to disturb or hurry you," she said, "you great, monstrous, noble old fellow!"

"Never," calmly.

"I believe you would take things just as easy if you were going to be hanged."

"Most assuredly, if it was a dead sure game against me, you know, my dear."

"You are the same imperturbable old giant, even with the anxiety of this venture hanging over us, when no one can say what a couple of hours may bring forth."

"It's because I refuse to be anxious, you know." He produced a pack of playing cards, and began to shuffle them with a caressing, indolent expertness. "Got any small change, my dear?"

"Yes, a few dollars."

"So have I. Come on."

She quickly returned the infant to his seclusion, and seated herself on the opposite side of the table, while he began to deal out the hands for *ecarte*.

"One minute, please, my dear," she said, opening and diving into a small drawer under her elbow. "Those are your own private cards, doubtless?"

"Of course."

"Well," shoving them back, and producing a fresh new pack, still in its original package, from the drawer, and tossing them toward him, "just try those for a change."

He laughed good-humoredly, shuffling and dealing out the new cards instead, and both were soon deeply immersed in their gambling pastime.

It lasted for the best part of an hour, the big Englishman winning steadily from his wife, and appearing to enjoy her consequent bad humor with an immense deal of quiet, chuckling amusement.

Finally, when about the last vestige of Pauline's little pile of silver had been transferred to his side of the table, an interruption was caused by the entrance of Justine in her true character of Sally Brown, which is a revelation that the reader must already have been prepared for.

"I am ready, and it is nearly eight o'clock," said the Gypsy girl. "Let us hurry on, and get through with this thing."

But she still glanced apprehensively at the hangings while speaking, and the fear-spell was as visible in the dusky pretty face as it had been in its blonde predecessor.

"How can the girl manage that complexion-change?" wonderingly asked the concealed detective of himself. "Even as a blonde, her skin looked just as purely natural as now, and the light hair was fully as perfect a cheat. It must be some Gypsy secret, that would make a fortune if patented and advertised. The Delamour herself, whose real complexion ought to be dark, including that wonderful hair of hers, can't get up quite the same brilliancy and naturalness of the Justine effect."

Pauline threw down her cards angrily, and arose, all her pocket-money gone.

"I hope you like it!" she exclaimed, with a half-spiteful look at her husband.

"What's the matter?" he chuckled, while coolly raking all the silver into his capacious pocket. "The paste-boards were of your own choosing this time; you can't deny that."

"Well, I had never marked them, anyway."

"Humph! I have your word for that, my dear."

Here the Delamour's wonderful hair came tumbling down her back, and through no intention on her own part either, which caused some delay in making herself in readiness, with Sally's not over good-humored assistance.

All were ready at last, however, and, after locking the drawing-room door leading into the private hall, they were proceeding to let themselves out of the apartment, as they had entered, by way of the dining-room, when Hartlieth suddenly picked up an object from a chair near the door of exit, and held it up suspiciously.

"Hallo!" said he.

It was a man's derby hat, and his own was upon his head.

The concealed detective for a moment caught his breath, for the hat was his. But fear-spelled Justine-Sally proved equal to the emergency.

"I picked that up from under the window, soon after you had gone this afternoon," she said, calmly. "It caused me something of a turn at the time, too, for do you know what I think: It must be the hat of that disguised Castlemaine whom we hurled to kingdom come down the shaft."

"Odd, though, that it should have remained lying around here ever since then," remarked Hartlieth. "However," tossing the hat away from him, "I do remember that the chap was bare-headed. Or, let me see, was he, or was he not?" [He had not been.] "However, there is no more time to lose!"

Sally accordingly got the baby, and then they all went out together, she last, and only pretending to lock the door.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

##### A CLEARING UP.

THE Hartlieth party were cautiously shadowed on their way by Castlemaine, with his policeman in attendance.

Then a pause of twenty minutes was made, after they were seen to be admitted into Mr. Blanton's house.

Then the detective himself rung the bell and gave the word to his assistants—the second of whom had joined him at the front gate, to range themselves within call just inside of the hall, irrespective of what the girl answering the ring might think or say.

But he had forgotten that the door would most likely be opened by Mary, the parlormaid, as it was, in fact, and there was no attempt on his part of maintaining his facial disguise.

Consequently, as he entered, with his companions stepping in behind him, the girl at first stared at him, and then reeled back, with wide eyes and an ashen face.

"Mr. Henry!" she gasped, trembling violently.

Castlemaine motioned his companions to close the entrance-doors.

"Hush, Mary!" he said, in a low voice. "It was all a mistake—I was never any more killed than you were. Here, feel my hand on yours; is it not warm and life-like? Now, Mary, try to be brave; just throw open the drawing-room door yonder, and announce me as 'Mr. Castlemaine, the Detective.'"

But the girl was still altogether too overcome for the effort, and the detective therefore motioned to one of his companions to undertake the thing.

It chanced that this policeman, who seemed to understand the situation pretty creditably, was rather a small, wiry man, with an exceptionally powerful voice, which had gained him the sobriquet of Foghorn Sanders among his brother officers.

He accordingly obeyed the intimation with a vengeance by suddenly opening the door indicated, and thundering out the announcement in tremendous tones.

The effect upon the company assembled within, when this was followed by the appearance of Castlemaine himself, can better be imagined than described.

There were present, besides the Hartlieth party, Mrs. Musgrave, Nelly, Mr. Blanton, and Tom Rashton.

The former (with the single exception of Sally, who sat, her baby in her arms, with an absolutely listless and indifferent expression), both husband and wife, were wearing an encouraged, if not absolutely exultant air, while that of the others was correspondingly depressed, save old Mr. Blanton, who was holding an open document in his hand, with an enigmatical expression in his shrewd old face, which might mean almost anything.

The detective's disclosure of himself changed all this as if by the stroke of a magician's wand.

Even Severne-Hartlieth, tried and veteran adventurer as he was, started from his seat and looked up with a momentarily-astonished air; while the Delamour fairly bounded half across the large room, glaring back at the intruder with a fright, amazement and bewilderment in her face that would have been a capital life-study for the Bernhardt with a new scenic tragedy in the prospective.

Mrs. Musgrave clapped her hands together.

"It's a clearing-up—the *denouement!*" she cried, snatching Nelly impulsively in her arms. "The devil—or I should say Mr. Satan, in good company—is coming to his own at last!"

"What does all this mean?" then exclaimed old Blanton. "Here seems to be a rumpus, surely."

Castlemaine kept his eyes on the Hartlieths like a hawk, and then began his exposition by drawing from his bosom a jewel-case—which he had abstracted from its last place of hiding before quitting the Perthshire rooms—and placing it in Mrs. Musgrave's lap.

"They are your stolen diamonds, ma'm," he said, simply; "and yonder," pointing to the Hartlieth couple, "are their most recent felonious custodians: though the jewels were stolen in the first place by this remarkable young woman," indicating Sally, who had remained as strangely indifferent as before, "at the instigation of Clarence Rorston."

"False! false!" screamed the Delamour, while Hartlieth, for himself, broke into a derisive laugh.

In fact, he had now nonchalantly resumed his seat—being used, gambler fashion, to sit out a game to the end, no matter how it might be going against him, and the first single flash of desperation having been already subjected to his iron self-control—and his laugh rung out in his regular, mellow English haw, haw, haw! that was mystifying, to say the least.

But the detective, without heeding their interruption, had turned gravely to Mr. Blanton.

"What is the paper in your hand, sir, if you please?" he asked.

Mr. Blanton simply handed it to him, without answering.

"This," said Castlemaine, glancing over the paper, "purports to be a certificate of a marriage performed at Providence, Rhode Island, last April a year ago, by Jonas Rathburne, an Episcopal clergyman there, the contracting parties being Clarence Rorston, of New York, and

Sarah Heathman, until recently theretofore, of Hartlieth, County Bucks, England.

"My friends, a marriage really took place, as herein set forth, with an important difference. The contracting bridegroom was really one John Brown, at that time a groom in the employ of said Rorston, who had procured him to become the husband of the young woman here mentioned, for a consideration.

"The name of John Brown has been cleverly effaced by acids, and that of Clarence Rorston substituted, as is patent to my expert examination.

"These facts, as stated by me, have been moreover, proved at Headquarters by a regular and producible correspondence with the officiating minister, Mr. Rathburne, on the subject.

"Moreover, I have no hesitation in further stating that the child now present is this young woman Mrs. Sally Brown's own child, by her said husband, John Brown, recently deceased, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"This is all most extraordinary," observed old Mr. Blanton, without heeding several vociferated denials on the part of the Delamour, Hartlieth himself still continuing nonchalantly silent, but with his eyes fixed upon the apathetic Sally with a peculiar expression that might have signified an approximation to hope. "It would be well, though, Mr. Castlemaine, if you had a witness present to what you charge."

"Such a witness is at hand, sir," resumed the detective. "She is here," he stepped up to Sally, "in the person of this young woman, whom I herewith, moreover, charge, on her own confession, with being the murderer of Clarence Rorston, as charged in the warrant for her arrest now in my possession, with the previous theft of certain diamonds belonging to Mrs. Janet Musgrave, as also charged therein, and also with the very recent murder of one, James O'Goolerhan, in Bellevue Hospital, this city, as likewise set forth in said warrant."

"Lies, lies, lies!" screamed the Delamour. "Get up and tell him so, Sally! What do you mean?" and she looked in panic-stricken astonishment at her sister, who had not so much as stirred.

"Be quiet, Pauline," interposed Hartlieth, composedly. "Don't make such a guy of yourself. Don't you see that the girl is bewitched?"

Was Sally, indeed, bewitched?

At all events, she quietly gathered her infant to her bosom, quieted it, and rose with the most perfect self-possession.

"All that has been charged here against me is perfectly true," she said, quietly—a little wearily, or sleepily, one would have said. "I make a formal confession before you all to this effect. I never wanted to go into this last fraud with you two, and you know it," with a resentful look at Polly and Hartlieth. "Why couldn't you let me keep out of it, as I wanted to do?"

Castlemaine produced a pair of glistening handcuffs, and she held out her wrists submissively; but he merely glanced at the babe in her arms, and returned them to his pocket, while motioning her to resume her seat.

He then stamped his foot, and the two policemen in waiting came nimbly into the room, showing their official shields as they did so.

"Arrest those two!" commanded the detective, indicating Hartlieth and Polly, and keeping his eye on the former, anticipative of a break. "The charge for the present is complicity in the murder of Clarence Rorston."

But the only trouble in making these arrests was a convenient fit of hysterics on the part of the Delamour, during which her remarkable hair did not fail to become disheveled, and the fit was of but brief duration.

As for Hartlieth, he merely said lazily, "This is all a mistake. But, as I abhor a row—notwithstanding that I could readily break the backs of three of you, and not half try, if I were so inclined—only keep the cuffs off me, and I shall accompany you at once. In every chance that has ever befallen me, I—aw—have always remained the one thing you know, and that is, an English gentleman."

They were all forthwith carried away, after the detective had promised Mr. Blanton that he would return to the house that same evening.

#### CHAPTER XLV. THE END OF IT ALL.

IT was fully two hours later when Castlemaine, after having disposed of his prisoners at Headquarters, returned to the Blanton, but he found those whom he had left there not only patiently waiting for him, but seeming to enjoy themselves at that.

Mrs. Musgrave had been playing a lively waltz on the piano for Nelly and Rashton to dance by; the old gentleman was also in a capital good humor, and wine and other refreshments were just on the point of being introduced.

"What d'ye think, Mr. Castlemaine?" cried Mr. Blanton. "Was there ever more unreasonable people than these young folks? Tom, the rogue, here, knows that Nelly is never going to receive a cent of my money, and yet the unworldly jackanapes insists on being more foolishly in love with her than ever. What do you think of it?"

"What do I think of it?" repeated the detective, laughing. "Why just this, my dear sir, that Tom will be as truly and worthily your adopted son in the future as Miss Nelly has been your faithful, loving daughter in the past."

"Well now, it's odd," said the old gentleman, suddenly drawing the young woman to his side, and affectionately pressing upon her brow what every one knew to be the kiss of forgiveness and peace, "but that is just what I've been thinking myself. What, weeping, Nell? Take her away, Tom, and kiss away her tears. But look here, Castlemaine," and Mr. Blanton turned smilingly toward the little widow, "here is yet another still young person to be disposed of."

"Mrs. Musgrave does not forget, I hope, that I am still her—servant," replied Castlemaine, with his old-time obsequiousness of bow and manner.

"Of course, I don't, *Mainecastle*," she replied, composedly. "And now, since it is nearly twelve o'clock, you shall see me home without further delay."

The distance thither was not great, as we know, but such words had secretly passed between those two before it had been covered that, when Mrs. Musgrave's attendant was about to accompany her into her house, she shook her head decidedly.

"But my month isn't up, ma'm," he pleaded. "You'll surely want me to serve my month out."

"I'll surely want you to do nothing of the sort," she replied.

"I can have the law on you for full wages."

"You can have the law on me for what you please."

They were entirely alone in the dimly-lighted hall, and he caught her in his arms.

"Shall it not be in the shape of a marriage certificate, Janet?" he whispered, covering her face with kisses.

"Yes," she managed to reply; and Castlemaine took himself off, with a great triumphing joy in his heart such as comes to no good man more than once in a lifetime, and to very many men never at all.

The clearing up of the great mystery was the sensation of the day on the following morning, and, as fresh developments from time to time came to light, it continued as such in the newspaper press long past the limits of the traditional nine days' wonder.

But there was an element of dissatisfaction in it all through the incomprehensibility of the character of Sally Brown, and the quietly original manner in which she managed to cheat justice at last.

On the morning of the second day following her formal indictment for her crimes, she produced a written confession, in which she included a good deal of her past history in full detail but in which she persistently denied that her sister or her brother-in-law had in any way been accessory to her misdeeds. In this confession she also threw out the only light, such as it was, that ever in any way explained the extraordinary contradiction in her character by which she had submitted so slavishly to the detective's demands upon her directly preceding her arrest, and had thus thrust her head so willingly, so to speak, in the noose that seemed destined to hang her.

This she explained by merely asserting that he had in some way cast a spell of fear over her which had gradually turned into a dreary sort of fascination, which she had neither the will, power nor inclination to resist.

On the next day following her baby died of the croup, and she was inconsolable, though undemonstratively so, and with a strange Pagan sort of submission to the inevitable, that enhanced the interest that was taken in her dark beauty, her unaffected heartlessness, and her enigmatical composition.

The reporters were in ecstasies over her; fashionable ladies, with nothing better to do than to sympathize with interesting criminals, to the forgetfulness of their barbarous crimes, brought her flowers which she did not thank them for, and tracts which she never read; and certain scientific gentlemen began to hope for important new developments from a psychological study of her characters.

But, alas! Sally Brown disappointed them all. Within less than a week after her arrest she was found dead in her cell, hanging by the neck from a hook to which she had fastened the unnoosed end of her stout corset-cord, having carried such enigma of perversity as she might have typified with her beyond human questioning and research.

The Hartlieths fared with much better luck than poor Sally: for if the latter was a pathological criminal she was perhaps more to be pitied than detested.

The big Englishman's family were really influential and rich, and they stood by him and his in the stress that was upon him. The Silent Sifter did not see fit to prosecute them for the attempt upon his own life. No indictment was found against them for complicity in Sally Brown's crimes. And, finally, after vexatious legal complications, they were set free, and disappeared somewhere abroad into the unknown.

There was a fine double wedding in Harlem on

the New Year's Day next following, at which Nelly Blanton became the happy wife of Tom Rashton, and our bold detective, Guy Castlemaine, led the rich and pretty little widow, Janet Musgrave, to the altar.

Both marriages have proved fortunate and felicitous. Tom Rashton became Mr. Blanton's business man, in which capacity he conducted himself with unexpected credit, and when the old gentleman died, a few years later, Nelly and her husband were found to have inherited his entire vast estate.

Castlemaine forthwith quit the detective profession, and went to traveling with his wife. They are now residing somewhere in France, and they are doubtless as happy as they deserve to be.

THE END.

#### BY COL. A. F. HOLT.

- 399 Black Buckskin; or, The Masked Men of Death Canyon.
- 419 Kenneth, the Knife-King.
- 435 Little Lightfoot, the Pilot of the Woods.
- 523 The Dandy Sport; or, The King Pin Conspirator.
- 673 Ralph Renwood, the Lightning Express Detective.
- 691 Headlight Harry's Haul.

#### BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

- 485 Git Thar Owney the Unknown.
- 492 Git Thar Owney's Pledge.
- 513 The Demon Doctor.
- 581 Double-Curve Dan, the Pitcher Detective.
- 598 Flute, the Singer Detective.
- 608 The Pitcher Detective's Foll; or, Dan's Double Play.
- 616 The Ocean Detective; or, The Last Cruise of the Black Bear.
- 681 The Pitcher Detective's Toughest Tussel.

#### BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 78 Blue Dick; or, The Yellow Chief's Vengeance.
- 87 The Land Pirates; or, The League of Devil's Island.
- 137 The Helpless Hand; or, Backwoods Retribution
- 289 The Gold-seeker Gide; or, The Lost Mountain.

#### BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 167 Asa Scott, the Steamboat Boy.
- 199 Featherweight the Boy Champion of the Muskingum.
- 223 Ozark Alf; or, Featherweight Among the Outlaws.
- 282 The Typo Detective; or, Weasel, the Boy Tramp.
- 295 Fearless Phil; or, The King of Quartzville.
- 311 The Roving Sport; or, The Pride of Chuckuck Camp.
- 322 Nero, the Detective; or, Kit Kenyon's Vendetta.
- 340 Clip the Contortionist; or, The Montana Vigilantes.

#### BY GEORGE WALDO BROWNE.

- 86 Dandy Rock the Man from Texas.
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